

THE UNFAITHFUL WIFE (*Den Utro Hustru*)

Translated from the Danish by
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Introduction

The Unfaithful Wife is preserved in Copenhagen, Royal Library Thott MS 780, along with two other plays in Danish, *The Judgement of Paris* (*Paris Dom*) and *The Play of St Dorothy* (*Comoedia de sancta virgine Dorothea*) and divers fragments. The three plays are written in different (if roughly contemporary) hands in separate gatherings on paper with different watermarks, suggesting the texts had an independent existence before being brought together. The dated (1531) signature of 'Christiern Hansen schoolmaster in the archdeaconry of Our Lady ...' may therefore say something about the context for the compilation of the manuscript (and perhaps performance of the plays) but is of little value in determining their authorship. *The Unfaithful Wife* remains resolutely anonymous, the more so as the MS text we have is clearly a copy — a line having been omitted (as shown by the rhyme scheme) between lines 307 and 308, for example, and the order of two others (203/204) reversed. The gathering containing our plays is a good deal more worn and faded than the others, suggesting that it had been put to use in preparing performances. Ironically, the assembling of the composite manuscript is probably a sign that the plays had ceased being performed — presumably around 1536, the date of the official Reformation in Denmark. That the play was thereafter read, in a more puritanical age than the later Middle Ages, is indicated by some corrections (noted below) in a later hand, removing some of the more blatant sexual allusions. The play is without title in the manuscript, our *The Unfaithful Wife* being a direct translation of the Danish *Den Utro Hustru* assigned by the play's first modern editor, S. Birket Smith, in 1874.

The Unfaithful Wife and *The Judgement of Paris* are the only two Danish plays surviving from the later Middle Ages qualifying as *fastelavnsspil*, that is plays performed in the context of (literally) 'eve of fast' festivities, i.e. Carnival (in the strict calendrical sense), or Shrovetide; the tradition is closely analogous to, and quite probably derived from, the German *Fastnachtspiele* of the same period.

The Unfaithful Wife starts in the classic manner of the Shrovetide interlude (also familiar from the later English mummers' plays) with the entry of a Presenter, here designated *Preco*, who greets the assembled company (evidently comprising both men and women), asks for room and attention, and describes the action and the major characters of the play to follow. The play-proper, like some of the Wooing Plays of the English mummers, comprises a sequence of wooings, in this case of a woman whose husband (in the first scene) has left her to go on a pilgrimage; she is subjected to the amorous advances, in turn, of a peasant, a friar, and a nobleman.

This basic sequence is elaborated by interactions between the three wooers and by the interventions of additional characters. The peasant visits a bathhouse in hopes of improving his appearance, only to have his beard singed and rubbed in filth by a mischievous attendant, and is eventually dragged off by his wife. The friar, who was happy to be instrumental in this *déroute*, is himself chased off by the courtier, while the latter has recourse to an old witch, who in turn conjures up a devil, before his suit is ultimately (through the intervention of a dog) successful. The Presenter's concluding remarks recommend anyone in the audience who needs the same kind of help to apply to the old witch, and he ends the show by requesting a drink before the performers go on their way.

The three plays in the Odense manuscript may well have comprised the dramatic repertoire of the pupils of the city's Our Lady's School, which is referred to in the manuscript note mentioned above, or of a similar institution. For Danish Shrovetide interludes seem to have been written by teachers connected with church-schools, and performed by the pupils as a means of acquiring food, drink, or money at a time of year when supplies were running low. There is documentary evidence for this as early as 1447 in an accord agreed to by two priors in Odense, and academic auspices for at least the composition of *The Unfaithful Wife* are suggested by the Latin stage-directions of the manuscript text. Performance was probably in the context of the Shrovetide feasts of the craft and trade guilds, held variously in the guild hall (if they had one), in the house of the master of the guild or of another member, or (in the case of journeymen's associations) at a tavern.

In terms of dramatic structure German scholarship distinguishes two varieties of *Fastnachtspiel*: the *Reihenspiel*, that is a simple sequence of speeches by a series of characters in turn, and the *Handlungsspiel*, i.e. a play with a plot involving more complex interaction between the characters

(including something more resembling conventional dialogue). By these standards the second Danish play, *The Judgement of Paris*, is a *Reihenspiel*, with Juno, Pallas, and Venus recommending themselves in turn to Paris, who finally chooses one of them. All English mummers' Wooing Plays in which the Lady is wooed in turn by the Farmer's Eldest Son, the Lawyer, the Old Man, and the Fool are of identical *Reihenspiel* structure. *The Unfaithful Wife* in contrast qualifies as a *Handlungsspiel*, but as often the case with the *Fastnachtspiele*, the simpler form is contained within the more complex, in this case the multiple wooing of the woman forming a *Reihenspiel* which is indeed probably the original nucleus of the play, since the opening summary of the plot by the Presenter mentions only characters involved in this part. Its source may be the *Fastnachtspiel* recorded in Lülbeck in 1471, *van eyner erlikenfruwen, de hade vele anlaghe unde bleff dock stanthafflich in eren* ('of an honest woman, who had many offers but yet remained true to her marriage'), or something similar. Several other sources supply the additional episodes in the play as it now survives, and contribute to reversing its outcome: it could well be that the original, moral play, suitable as it may have been for the patricians of Lübeck's *Zirkelgesellschaft*, required transformation into something more appropriate for performance before Danish craftsmen, with an ethos much closer to the notoriously impolite *Fastnachtspiele* of Nüremberg.

The weeping bitch can be traced back in the first instance to a fable in *Steinhöwel's Äsop* (Lattin Gennan, 1475), but the motif had of course been given dramatic rendition in England as early as about 1300 in *Dame Siriz* (which is more likely to be an interlude than a purely narrative *fabliau*). The immediate source of this episode in the Danish play is likely to be another German *Fastnachtspiel*, however. Other episodes in the Danish play certainly deploy motifs familiar from various German *Fastnachtsspiele*: the peasant who woos the lady but is rejected on account of his coarse and dirty appearance; the domestic altercation between peasant and wife; the visit to the bathhouse; the friar who is willing to discard his cowl to get the woman; the old woman who conjures up the devil. This impressive collection of correspondences places *The Unfaithful Wife* firmly in the tradition of the *Fastnachtspiele* of the German linguistic and cultural sphere.

The Unfaithful Wife is a vehicle for Estates satire, in which the three 'old' Estates — the nobility, the clergy (here the religious orders) and the peasantry — are laughed to scorn from the point of view of the new Estate, the craftsmen. Concurrently the moral and ethical system of the craftsmen themselves is reinforced and behaviour incompatible with it is corrected.

This is highly appropriate to the play's seasonal auspices, since the cultural ethos of the craftsmen manifests itself in the Carnival period, during which they are liberated not merely from the regulation imposed by religious and secular authorities but also from the constraints of the guild system itself, which controlled so much of everyday life at other times. During Carnival the artisans seek to establish for themselves a free space in which to display and satisfy their bodily needs in the material (food and drink), physical (dance and song), and not least sexual spheres. This free space should be seen not so much as a contrast to the everyday way of life of the craftsmen as an extension and intensification of that way of life under the special conditions provided by Carnival.

At the time when *The Unfaithful Wife* was written and performed the aspirations of craftsmen were still characterised by the pursuit of pleasure; the modern work-ethic and disciplined sense of time had yet to establish themselves. The play accepts the sexual needs of both men and women without offering moral extenuations, and the sexual interplay between the woman and her wooers is presented with a sensuality which the audience is evidently intended to appreciate. At the same time the implied criticism of the husband's pilgrimage anticipates the work-ethic and the insistence on the importance of domestic commitments which were later to dominate bourgeois attitudes.

The woman is presented as a active participant in the action with her own opinions and her own needs — not least sexual — which she has every right to take account of. The late-medieval view of woman which makes sexuality a sin and ascribes the sin exclusively to her, has yet to manifest itself at the time to which *The Unfaithful Wife* belongs. The tightening of morality, which occurs in Germany in the 1470s, does not manifest itself in Denmark until about 1520. On the other hand there are features of *The Unfaithful Wife* such as the long introductory summary which suggest a degree of influence from the humanist academic drama. These and other features suggest that the play belongs to the beginning of the sixteenth century.

As a Shrovetide interlude designed to be performed in the context of Carnival revels, *The Unfaithful Wife* shares the simple dramaturgy and limited theatrical requirements of the contemporary German *Fastnachtspiele* and the later English mummers' plays performed under similar auspices. Comparison with Tudor interludes such as *Fulgens and Lucrez* is also legitimate and reciprocally enlightening. Performance probably involved ten performers, i.e., the number of characters, since there is no reason to

presume doubling was resorted to. While the rôle of the Wife would require some memory and histrionic skills, most of the others are limited in scope and complexity. Costuming would present few difficulties — especially at Carnival time — the most extravagant guise presumably being that of the Devil. With two notable exceptions staging and performance requirements are modest, few scenes involving more than two characters at a time, and then with fairly simple interaction. The action comprises mainly dialogue enlivened with bursts of physical confrontation: the Peasant beaten and dragged off by his Wife; the Friar chased off by the Courtier, the Devil whispering in the Woman's ear and then shouting with exasperation. The basic staging situation would presumably involve no more than performance in an acting area of floor space with no raised stage or scenery, close to a door from which the characters can make their entry, and doubtless in close proximity to the audience. The third-former playing the lady would have to be prepared for at least some verbal harassment.

The two more complex scenes involve rather more elaborate stage business, which could have been handled in a number of ways. While the easiest way to handle the scene with the dog would be to use a dummy, the Latin stage direction does seem to indicate that the dog was seen to cry, and was led: *Sic vetula ducat canem ad mulierem flens cum cane petens auxilium ab ea*. So unless we are to imagine that a real dog was induced to weep (as in *Dame Siriz*) by the application of condiments, and then lugged across the floor on a lead, it is more likely the part was taken by an actor. Complex in another way is the bathhouse scene, and a lot depends on just how much was left to the audience's imagination. Certainly the text does seem to suggest some fairly elaborate action and the deployment of fairly substantial properties, with the peasant clambering into some kind of hot bath and then having his beard singed, but much of this could be achieved with token properties and gestures.

The following translation is offered as a performance text, true to the spirit of the original and to its text on a stanza-by-stanza or couplet-by-couplet basis, but taking some liberties with word and phrase-order for the sake of rhyme and rhythm. The metre and rhyme-schemes of the original (whose variation seems to reflect some forethought) are echoed, with the exception that Danish cross-rhyme (*knittelverse*, i.e. abab) is rendered into the easier ballad stanza (abcb). Stage directions and speech-prefixes are translated as they stand (they are in Latin in the original), as the shifting designation of the central character seems to reflect changing perceptions of her status and relationships.

THE UNFAITHFUL WIFE

Characters:

Husband	Friar
Wife	Courtier
Rustic	Old Woman
Stewkeeper	Devil
Woman	

Herald: Wassail! Good day, beloved friends,
To you that are herein;
Respects and honour to one and all,
The men-folk and the women.

5 I'm hither come to make you glad,
Having spent the day with my gang:
I travelled here on a broken sledge,
And numerous dangers ran.

10 Now give us room and a bit of quiet,
And let your chattering cease,
So I can say a few of God's words,
Which doubtless will you please.

15 For the company which is in here,
We'll devise a little play,
If you would like to hear it,
Beginning right away.

20 Then you will see a fragrant rose,
Beset with many a wooer:
For to sleep with her is sheer delight,
Believe me friends, I know her.

First comes a Peasant, filled with lust,
 and he her love demands,
 But then his wife arrives in haste
 And thwarts his amorous plans.
 25 Then a friar the wooer plays,
 And dances in his cloak,
 Until a haughty Courtier comes,
 And gives his back a stroke:
 He drives him to the friary —
 30 His wooing tongue is still;
 So the Friar gets little honour,
 And even less his will.
 The Courtier then applies his guile
 To tempt the girl to sin;
 35 He's certain that he'll get his will,
 Her love for sure he'll win.
 Now! Anyone who'll not keep quiet,
 Or will not watch the play,
 I'll give him such a kick on the arse
 40 It'll ache the rest of the day.

The Husband to his Wife:

Wife of my heart, and jewel of my mind,
 To me you've ever been true and kind;
 I never saw so blessed a dame,
 So firm in troth, ever the same:
 45 And that is why my hope is great
 My purpose you'll appreciate.
 Together we've lived long on earth,
 With many pleasures and much mirth:
 My tally of sins is large, I fear,
 50 Increasing with each passing year,
 So I must seek the pilgrim's way:
 I hope that you will not say nay.
 If I but knew what else to do,
 To redeem my sins, win pardon true,

55 With right good will I would do so:
 Such are my thoughts, I would have you know.

The Wife to the Husband:

 My world's honour, my heart's cheer,
 You are my noble husband dear;
 Whatever you wish, I wish so too,
60 Whatever you think is best to do;
 But thinking about your sins always
 Is not a good way to spend your days:
 If my advice has any weight,
 Stay at home here with your mate:
65 It's better that you stay at home
 Than like a tramp the land to roam.

The Husband to the Wife:

 Well I've always said it for a fact,
 You have your own very special tact:
 I wouldn't fear to wager my life
70 That falsehood's quite unknown to my wife;
 I could almost believe, when your words I mark,
 You've been learning sophistry from the clerk:
 Do you really advise I atone for my sin
 By staying at home with you, sweet thing?
75 Now all who hear this can surely say,
 That idle chatter is not your way.
 But this will not work, as you know well,
 To escape the very grasp of Hell,
 By living at ease in pleasure here,
80 With sleep and drink and belly-cheer!
 If absolution I would seek,
 My way I must wend upon my feet
 To holy shrines, and fulfill my vow:
 This is the truth, believe me now.

The Wife to the Husband:

85 Alas, dear husband of my heart,
 That would cause me pain and smart;

If you should depart and leave this place
 I'd be ever afraid of the dangers you face;
 Stay with me here, that is my prayer,
 90 I'll never cause you trouble or care.

Husband:

Don't ask me that, my wife so dear,
 It simply can't be done, I fear;
 For I made a vow in my deepest dole,
 And to break it could endanger my soul.
 95 So live now chastely, as you should;
 As you have been ever, so now be good.
 I take my staff; my hat I have too;
 So farewell and goodnight to you.

The Man to the Woman:

Wassail! good day, my sister dear,
 100 What do you, standing quietly here,
 And why are you alone?
 A husband if you had at all,
 Or maids, or menservants at your call,
 You'd not be on your own.

The Woman, the Wife:

105 I have a husband; he is not at home,
 God's blessing on him be;
 My servants are not now at hand,
 as they really ought to be.
 He left on a pilgrimage yesterday,
 110 which I do much regret;
 He won't be back within the year,
 which fills my heart with dread.

The Man to the Woman:

If he can leave the land so long,
 and make you sad and blue:
 115 Well, get yourself another man,
 that's what I say to you.

Woman:

No, anything of that kind
is wrong without a doubt;
Dishonour and shame is all I'd get
120 from all those who found out.
My husband would me justly hate,
when he came home again;
And never love me like before,
so little I would gain.

Man:

125 How would he ever get to know
that you'd a lover found?
It would all be done so secretly,
and never get around.
Don't be mean, since you have got
130 of beauty such a share;
For if your husband did return
there'd be plenty left to spare.
Now what I've said, you think thereon,
my lovely little sweetheart:
135 My lust for you it is so great,
from you I cannot part.
If only I could find a way
to win your love so true!
If I might mount you for a while
140 that's the best way I can woo.

Woman:

Don't say such things, in heaven's name,
For that would be both sin and shame.
For a country lout of the kind you are
Farting among horses is better far;
145 That you should ever lie with me,
I hope that day I'll never see;
With your ancient corpse completely worn
You'd look best hung up on a thorn.

150 And don't you have a wife back home?
 I guess she often sleeps alone.
 You've such a foul, long, pointed beard,
 And your shitty legs need a wash, I fear.
 Now instead of thinking what to say,
 I'd rather you farted and went your way.

Man:

155 My dear, don't speak so harsh to me;
 You'll soon have something better to see.
 And I don't any longer have a wife:
 If you say so, you lie, upon my life;
 Once it's true I wed an old shrew,
 160 Who nagged at me and grumbled too,
 But to evil she did ever tend,
 Which is why she came to a terrible end.
 And what if my beard is not the best size?
 And what if I've shitten all over my thighs?
 165 To the bath-house I will go in a trice
 And come back looking clean and nice.

The Man goes looking for the bathhouse:

Shavebeard! Wassail be to you this day:
 Get that bathhouse hot right away,
 So I can lie in a lovely bath
 170 And come out lily-white, fore and aft;
 Now no discussion, no delay,
 I've money enough, so well I'll pay.

Stewkeeper:

Well, well, well, it's your lucky day,
 And it wouldn't do any harm, I'd say:
 175 You've come at just the right time, indeed,
 Everything's ready that you need.
 Take off your clothes and lay them aside;
 Now creep in here, I'll stay outside.

Man:

180 Stop, stop, no more, you make me fear
 I'll sweat to death from the heat in here.

If you've got any good soap lying about
You can shave my beard when I come out.

Stewskeeper:

Then out you come, and I'll give you a shave,
So no one has seen such a handsome knave.

And then he smears him with mud and burns his beard with a candle.

Man:

185 My dear friend, do me a favour before I go:
Say, am I a handsome man or no?

Stewskeeper:

A handsome man? Why there's no debate,
I tell you true, you look so great
In all the best circles you can go anywhere,
190 And no one will notice you don't belong there.

The Man returning to the Woman says:

See, how do I please you now, my fair,
Am I not both white and debonaire?

Woman:

No, you're uglier now than you were before,
I only wish you were out the door,
195 Your pestering is dishonourably meant,
And I wish you'd have an accident.

Then his Wife comes and sees him courting the Woman and says:

Niels Fog-Lantern, what's this I see,
When you should be at home with me?

The Man to her:

Sweet wife, I pray don't get upset,
200 I haven't been here very long as yet;
Home I'll go without delay:
Don't beat me up or hard words say.

The Friar coming in says to her:

A dangerous husband you've got there,
 Seducing women is all his care:
 205 His prick was driving him on like mad
 And that same woman he nearly had.

Wife:

Shame on him, and fortune small:
 At home he hardly tries at all;
 His frozen prick he'll need to thaw,
 210 To get on my belly any more.
 I tell you true, in four long years
 He hasn't got past my pubic hairs.
 Now get you home in sorrow's name:
 Not that I hope thereby to gain.

And then she drags him off by the hair and takes him home, after which the Friar addresses himself to the fair one:

215 Peace be with you, my lily-flower!
 Oh, how my heart is in your power.
 Am I not a full handsome man?
 Say how you like me, if you can.
 Don't let my friar's cowl make you scoff,
 220 It's a simple matter to take it off.
 So: now you see my handsome face;
 The friar's gone away some other place.

The Woman replies:

To hear this nonsense isn't nice;
 Do you really think you'd me entice
 225 To go to bed with a holy brother
 And get all kinds of trouble and bother?
 If I really would my virtue waste,
 A courtier would better suit my taste.

The Courtier coming in says to the Friar:

Brother Bounce-Hood! Well met, I say;
 230 Why aren't you at the abbey today?

Shouldn't you be at your daily prayer,
Instead of pestering that woman there?

The Friar replies:

My dear young man, don't think I adore her:
We musn't chase women in my order;
235 I wouldn't be here for such a cause,
And doing things against our laws:
I've come to town to get some cheese:
Don't think otherwise, if you please.

Courtier:

You're lying, for which you may repent;
240 To hide the truth is your intent:
You crave so much with this girl to sleep
That both your eyes have begun to weep.
Now such a beating I'll give you for it,
You'll be glad to get away without your habit.
245 I'll take you back to your holy cloister
And teach you not with intent to loiter.

*And then he beats the Friar, pulling off his cloak, and drives him
back to the friary; after which the Courtier says to the fair Woman:*

Peace with you, housewife, whoever you be:
I would to God you were home with me!
I find myself inclined to pleasure;
250 I'd give you joy beyond all measure.
If only I could make you see
It would be well to submit to me:
If you would but take me to your breast,
You'd find I really am the best.

Woman:

255 Dear sir! Don't speak of such to me,
To that I never could agree.
You really shouldn't even try
Persuading me with you to lie.

Courtier:

260 Don't say no, my dear friend,
 Withdraw your words and speak again;
 You said a courtier you preferred
 To any friar; that's what I heard;
 And so I drove the friar away,
 Because of those words that you did say.

Woman:

265 How could you imagine that was so,
 I have a husband, as you know.
 I promised him I would be true,
 And upon my soul that will I do.
 I trust you will not angry be,
 270 But that you leave, it is my plea.

And then the Courtier approaching the Old Woman says:

My dear mother, to you wassail!
 I hope your help can me avail.
 For of your aid I have great need,
 I hope you'll not refuse indeed.
 275 Whatever you want, yours shall it be,
 And we'll be friends, I guarantee.
 A woman there is I lust for so,
 But the only reply I get is no;
 Is there anything you can devise
 280 To make me attractive in her eyes,
 So I can win her right good will?
 See if you can use your skill.

The Old Woman says:

Ah well, my son, that might well be;
 But first of all please let me see
 285 How much you'll give to get your fun,
 Before I let my black hen run.

Courtier:

Such a reward it will be yours
 If your art my pleasure ensures;

290 Yes, there'll be thanks and money as well:
But let's see if you know your spell.

Thus the Old Woman:

Wicked devil and Gilibere,
Run with your tails up in the air,
Beelzebub and demons all,
At my feet I bid you fall;
295 Do at once what I have urged
Or with whips you will be scourged.
Now apply your deceitful might
And see that you do use it right
And make that woman feel the urge
300 To give herself without reserve
In fornication with this knight,
And never want to leave his sight.

The Devil not responding at once, the Old Woman says angrily:

Pocked-faced knave, I conjure thee
To heed my call immediately.
305 With bread and salt I conjure you in sight,
By Heron, Cuckoo, and the Red Knight;
By Norway's Cliff and Vendel's Nore,
[By Western Sea and Eastern Shore;]
By all the witches yet untold
310 That can be found o'er all the world;
I conjure you by shrewish wives,
Be it far or near they live their lives,
That you yourself no longer hide
But come at once here to my side.

The Devil enters trembling:

315 My coming cannot be delayed,
For of you I'm sore afraid;
By shrewish wives you conjure me,
Afraid for my life I may well be:
For evil they are, and wicked as well,
320 And they can bind all the devils of hell.

So, dearest, do me no more ill,
And I will do whatever you will.

And thus the Old Woman:

Go and whisper in the woman's ear
That fornication she need not fear,
325 But consent to what her lover demands;
Begone! for those are my commands.

*And the Devil goes to the Woman and puts his mouth to her ear, but
when she doesn't obey he says in a loud voice:*

Long might I whisper in your ear,
Before you'd do what I say, I fear;
How come you are so hard to convert
330 To letting a man inside your skirt?
The flesh of a man is sheer delight,
When lying with him all the night.
A wealthy woman you'll be if you will,
Eat what you like, and drink your fill.
335 It's better by far to live the sweet life,
Than struggling all day with sorrow and strife.

Woman:

Away foul fiend with your tempting lie,
Your wisdom is baseless, I well espy;
No matter how long you go on in this way,
340 There's never a chance I will do as you say.

The Devil returns to the Old Woman:

I hardly know what I shall do
For I am so afraid of you;
That woman's troth it is so strong,
No tempter can make her do any wrong.
345 If you made all the devils participate,
They still couldn't get her to fornicate.

The Old Woman to the Devil:

Be damned, ugly troll, and cursed be your name,
You're false to me, and I wish you shame;

Whoever trusts you, you let them down;
350 In misery unending may you be bound.
What happened to all the clever ruses
You said you had for various uses?
You're good for nothing, if you want my view:
May every misfortune fall on you!
355 I have a good mind to grab your hair
And whip the skin of your body bare.

And she beats him and having done so the Old Woman says:

Go back to hell and join your friends,
Endure the torment that never ends.

The Old Woman to the Courtier:

Alas, no lovers' dance there'll be:
360 That woman says no so steadfastly;
I think my arts will not succeed:
I'm sorry you won't get what you need.

The Courtier to the Old Woman:

You'll be sorry indeed, old witch, believe me,
If you let me down so grievously.
365 To take my money you were quick enough,
You can't give up when the going gets tough,
Or else I'll ensure that you meet a bad end,
So bad they'll hear of it throughout the land.

The Old Woman:

Stop, stop, for a moment, let me be;
370 I have another trick, just wait and see:
After this she'd oblige any peasant that passed,
And as you will notice, it works very fast.

And then the Old Woman takes the dog to the Woman, she and the dog both crying, and begs advice of her:

Little daughter dear, how do you do,
I'm very pleased at meeting with you;

375 If you've anything to give, as today's good deed,
 Then please give it me for I have great need.

The Woman to the Old Woman:

 My poor mother dear, why weep you so?
 What is the matter? please let me know.

The Old Woman:

 My sorrow it has so many a part
380 I keep them here within my heart;
 But I will tell it all to you,
 Even though there's little you can do.
 I can see it clearly from your eyes,
 You know the difference 'twixt truth and lies.

The Woman to the Old Woman:

385 Of myself I can truly say it,
 If you tell me a secret I won't betray it.

The Old Woman to the Woman:

 The dog that you see with me there,
 She was my daughter, beautiful and fair;
 A young man came to her a-wooing,
390 And certain things he would be doing,
 But didn't get far along that way,
 For every time she just said nay;
 But suddenly she was bewitched,
 And turned into this weeping bitch.
395 Beauty! It was symbolised in her:
 But now she's just a mangy cur.
 Therefore it is my heart grieves so,
 I mourn and weep, with such sorrow:
 Had she been willing to love and kiss,
400 She wouldn't be the way she is.

Woman:

 Maria! I'm full of consternation,
 What an awful transformation!

Now I don't know what I should do:
I fear I might so suffer too.
405 A man asked me with him to lie,
Which I repeatedly did deny.

Old Woman:

God bless us, that was hardly wise;
Upon my soul I do advise,
If I may plainly give my view,
410 If that man comes again to you
Do what he wants, whatever it is,
Or else you might end up like this.

Woman:

It's all so puzzling, to my mind:
I've never done anything of the kind;
415 But I'm resolved, irrevocably,
That if he comes again to me,
Rather than end in this canine fashion,
I'll agree to satisfy his passion.

Then the Old Woman goes dancing towards the Courtier, saying:

Rejoice, young man, it's your lucky day,
420 I rather think you'll get your way;
I've got her into such a state,
She's yours for the asking on a plate.
Now I'm going home, and will not stay,
Just say thank you and go your way.

The Courtier to the fair Woman:

425 Now I approach you once more here,
Hoping for a welcome dear,
Could I but your affection get,
As I explained last time we met,
I should give you all you say
430 And love you till my dying day.
If you refuse, you'll hurt yourself,
It might be damaging to your health.

Woman:

Don't start your magic tricks with me,
 For I will now your lover be;
 435 Whatever you want, that will I do:
 Take me wherever it pleases you.

Presenter:

In this play you've seen and heard,
 How the witch helped the courtier get the bird.
 Now if any of you want to try this device,
 440 It's of the witch you should ask advice;
 The devil has taught her many an art,
 As you could see when she played her part.
 So to you all, wassail, and so long!
 If we've cheered you up that can't be wrong.
 445 Now it's time that we got out of here,
 But not before we've had some beer!

Commentary

Characters: this translates the list of 'performers' (*agentes*) heading the MS text: *maritus*, *vxor*, *vir rusticus*, *bastwemandt* (i.e. stewkeeper), *mulier* (i.e. the rustic's wife), *monachus*, *aulicus*, *vetula*, *diabolus*, *preco*.

Title: the play has no title in the manuscript, ours translating the *Den Utro Hustru* conventional since the first edition, by Birket Smith, in 1874.

0 prefix: No speaker is designated, but this is clearly the same figure as the *Preco* in the list of characters, and who takes leave of the company at the conclusion (437 prefix). *Preco* is an abbreviation of *precursor*, corresponding to the *vorläufer* of the German *Fastnachtspiele*: the corresponding Presenter of the English mummings' plays sometimes introduces himself as 'he who comes before'.

1. *Wassail*: the etymology of the Danish *helsel* is similar, but has no specifically Christmas overtones; some other medieval Danish

- plays (e.g. *The Judgement of Paris*) open with the same greeting to the audience.
4. Note the explicit reference to women (*quinnæ*, Modern Danish *kvinder*) in the audience.
6. *gang*: crowd; i.e. the company (Elizabethans would have said the 'rout') performing the play; this is Leif Søndergaard's interpretation of the Danish *skare* in this line: earlier editors have taken it to refer to the town of Skara in what is now southern Sweden.
9. *give us room*: striking to see this familiar mummers' play formula so clearly (*giffwe roem*) so early.
10. *Peasant*: a useful specification as a peasant (*bonde*) of this figure who is merely labelled 'man' (*Vir*) in the Latin speech-prefixes and stage-directions and 'countryman' (*vir rusticus*) in the list of characters.
26. *dances*: a useful hint of stage business not explicit from the dialogue or stage directions during the friar's wooing. The Danish text specifies the dance as a *ree*, probably the German *Reientanz* sometimes referred to in early English sources as the 'ray', characterized by a vigorous hopping similar (and probably related) to the capers of the morris dance.
- 41ff. With the opening of the dialogue the verse-form shifts from the cross-rhyme (abab) of the Presenter's address to the irregular four-stress couplets favoured by much late-medieval popular literature (including drama) in the German-speaking and Scandinavian areas.
- 66 *tramp*: in the original literally a 'stave-carl', i.e. a wandering tramp with a staff (cf. Langland's similarly ambivalent 'hermits ... with hooked staves' who 'went to Walsingham' on a not too serious pilgrimage to avoid work (*Piers Plowman* B-Text Prologue 53–7)).
- 98 *good night*: corresponds to the original's *gaade natth*, and in either language an unexpected valediction at the outset of a journey: it may be addressed as much to the audience (at their Lent-eve revels) as to the wife.

- 98 *sd* speech prefixes significantly (if perhaps unconsciously) redefine the 'Wife' (*Vxor*) as a mere 'Woman' (*Mulier*), although she is a transitional 'The Woman the Wife' (*Mulier Vxor*) at 104 *sd*; the 'Man' here is the Peasant-figure referred to at line 21.
- 99ff. The Countryman's first speech, in what may be an appropriate shift in metrical idiom, is in tail-rhyme; the Wife/Woman responds in cross-rhyme (a significant concession given the couplets she used to her husband?), and the Countryman falls into line with this from line 113.
- 141ff. The Woman (shocked into recovering her dignity?) modulates back into couplets and the Countryman, again compliant, follows suit at line 155.
- 166 *sd* *looking for*: the Latin says clearly 'grumbling' (*querens*), but this could be a mistake for the more appropriate 'looking/asking for' (*quaerens*).
- 205 *prick*: the Danish *legom* could mean bodily lust in general, but the friar probably intends this more specific meaning (to which the peasant's Wife responds at line 209).
- 211 A later hand has bowdlerized this to 'Into our house he never comes'.
- 212 The same hand has changed this to 'He has never been home'.
- 214 *sd* The stage directions continue their undermining of the heroine's integrity: first a wife, then a woman, she is now 'the fair one' (*pulchra*).
- 247 Literally, 'Peace be with you, fair housewife, as you sit or stand there', which has too many stresses: The performer is evidently meant to opt for 'sit' or 'stand' depending on the dramaturgical situation; an interesting indication that the text was designed as a script for performance.
- 291 *Gilibere*: a common name for a troll in the sixteenth century; appropriately, however, it means literally 'wooing-beard'.
- 308 This line supplied in the translation in the spirit of the original, and to supply the second line of a couplet evidently omitted in transcribing the MS text.

359 The regret that there will be no dance when the first attempt to seduce the woman fails may suggest that there is a dance at the conclusion (in the manner of a mummers' play and Fastnachtspiel) when the second attempt succeeds.