

PETER G. BEIDLER AND THERESE DECKER

Preliminary Remarks

Boss for three days is a Middle Dutch farce of the late fourteenth century. It is one of ten secular plays in the Hulthem Manuscript in the Royal Library in Brussels. Eight of the plays are paired-up serious and farcical doublets. That is, we find in the Hulthem Manuscript four longer, serious plays known as *abele spelen*, each followed by a much shorter, humorous play known as a *sotternie* that offers a comment on the serious play or else offers comic relief from it. In addition to these eight paired plays there are two farces that are not connected to any of the others. One of these is *Boss for three days* (*Drie daghe here*), a domestic farce about a henpecked husband who thinks he makes a clever bargain with his wife so that he can wear the pants for three days running. In part because this comedy stands alone and is not connected to an *abel spel*, and in part because it has seemed to most readers to be incomplete, *Boss for three days* has been almost entirely ignored by scholars. We attempt here to bring to the attention of both scholars and acting groups a wonderful little piece of domestic drama.

H. E. Moltzer, in his work *De middelnederlandsche dramatische poëzie*, Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1875, provides a transcription of *Boss for three days*, along with useful notes and comments about the meaning of individual words and phrases. The goal of our edition, however, is simultaneously more complex and simpler. On the one hand we wish to lay bare before the reader's eye the process of translating a medieval text by presenting the original and, through several steps, how we arrived at a version comprehensible to a modern, English-speaking audience. On the other hand, we also want our readership to be aware that "translating" means "interpretation," whether this manifests itself in the seemingly straightforward act of translation or in critical essays. In a certain sense, all translation is an interpretation, and every critical analysis is a translation. In order to demonstrate this working process, we proposed to the editor of this Journal to present *Boss for three days* in four versions:

Version 1 is a facsimile of the manuscript version of *Boss for three days* so that scholars can see a reasonable approximation of what the medieval manuscript actually looks like.

Version 2 is an exact transcription, without punctuation, of the manuscript version in Middle Dutch, while Version 3 is a literal translation, with punctuation now added according to English usage. It attempts, as much as possible, to keep the wording of the original in the proper lines. Even though the translation often seems awkward in modern English, we felt that readers would be well served by having the translated words appear in almost the same sequence as they are in the original. To this end, Versions 2 and 3 are printed in facing columns.

Version 4 is a much looser acting translation that we worked on together. It is accurate in the broad outlines, but is designed to be used by a modern acting troupe in actual performance. It divides the play into six scenes and provides minimal stage and acting directions. It bypasses a few phrases that do not translate well into modern English, it rearranges the "Germanic" word order of other phrases and sentences, and it generally modernizes the language and action for twentieth-century audiences. It was this version that

Beidler's students used for a reader's theater production of the play at Baylor University and at a regional conference.

Following the four versions of *Boss for three days* are six scholarly interpretations written by Beidler's graduate students at Baylor University. They were first presented in oral form at a regional conference, then later revised for publication. They may be said to represent six different modern "translations" of the play into the language of scholarly analysis.