CHAUCER’S ROSE

Unsolved problems about the extant copies of Chaucer’s poems still cast their shadows between author and reader. An earlier paper considered the unique manuscript of the revised Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* written shortly before his death in 1400. Here enquiry is directed to the unique and imperfect copy of his early and most problematic poem, his translation of *Le Roman de la Rose*, about 22,000 lines in octosyllabic couplets, begun by Guillaume de Lorris c.1225 and completed by Jean de Meun c.1275. Using now standard techniques of linguistic analysis this paper proposes that a single language underlies the extant copy of the poem and that Chaucer’s authorship of the whole is indisputable.

There is no certain date for the translation. On circumstantial evidence Chaucer began it after 1366 (his marriage to Philippa de Roet) and completed it before 1376 (his appointment as Comptroller of Customs at the Port of London). The *Book of the Duchess* c.1370 cites *Le Roman de la Rose* at line 334 but its dependence on it (e.g. at lines 402–33, 653–61) is not on the ME translation; whereas the *Hous of Fame* c.1379 (e.g. lines 1212f., 265f., 1257f.) gives close verbal repetitions of it. Chaucer referred to his translation in the *Legend of Good Women* in 1386 and again in its revised Prologue in 1399. Sir Lewis Clifford told Deschamps (who knew little English) of this translation when they were both part of the treaty negotiations at Calais in 1393, and Deschamps sent Chaucer by hand of Clifford some of his balades with a specially composed tribute praising Chaucer as a *grand translateur*.

The unique and imperfect copy of this translation is now in the Library of the University of Glasgow, MS Hunter 409. It is written in anglicana formata (in a hand which, within present knowledge, does not occur elsewhere) between 1425 and 1450. Its main features are clarity and restraint. Its forms are double-compartment *a*; open *e*; looped ascenders of *b*, *k*, *l*; the ascender of *d* and the descender of *y* with larger and more lightly marked loops; the ascenders of *w* rise slightly above the median line which otherwise is uniformly maintained; uppercase *I* slightly tipped and tailed with central stem. Apart from barred -ll (which may be a flourish) there are few abbreviations. The hand is exceptionally neat and its accuracy in copying (as noted below) supports its clarity.
The decoration, put on after writing, now consists mainly of floral splays with gilt studs supporting illuminated initials throughout. The single surviving demi-vinet at fol. 57v is elaborately coloured with its dominant flower ‘lords-and-ladies’ as in line 935, a phallic symbol occurring in contemporary manuscripts of courtly love verse of costly production. Probably some of the eleven leaves cut from the manuscript after it was used as a copy-text by Thynne in 1532 contained similar decoration. Comparable work is found in two manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*, MSS Bodley 686 and Laud misc. 600, cf. MS Bodley 795 dated 1435 and written at Oxford. Assuming a *deluxe* commission for an armigerous patron, hand and decoration suggest a provenance of c.1435 at Westminster.6

Linguistic analysis of the translation (as summarized below) suggests that it is based on one underlying manuscript written at Westminster c.1405 which was copied in the succeeding scribal tradition by two or more teams of scribes whose individual members wrote separate stints, generally of quires of eight leaves, each page having twenty-four lines. Further, it appears that the extant text is a conflation of two separate fragments of that scribal tradition; the first and larger fragment contained lines 1–5810, and the second (a discontinuous section from a later part of the French poem) lines 5811–7692. The copy-text of MS Hunter 409 may have derived from a stationer who combined stints of separate scribes using different textual subgroups, which later lost its middle and final quires. Some manuscripts of the *Troilus* and the *Canterbury Tales* have such mixed textual histories. One leaf of another copy, derived independently from the common ancestor, survives, containing lines 2403–50, and was written c.1450.7 Like MS Hunter 409 this leaf has twenty-four lines to each page. The copy-text of the latter section of MS Hunter 409 also had twenty-four lines to the page, as evidenced by the displacement of a bifolium containing lines 7109–58 and 7207–54 which was not noticed by the scribe of its immediate copy.

The scribe of MS Hunter 409 did not notice this textual displacement but was otherwise a careful copyist who checked his text for his own errors. He added in the margins lines 6190, 7035, 7592, and the word *eke* at 6609, having originally omitted them. Elsewhere he corrected his copy 31 times by superscript addition of single letters and expunction, occasionally failing to notice lapses like *iu* in line 7092 and the miswriting of single graphs within words. This low incidence of error is reflected in his leaving thirteen blank spaces where he noticed by absence of rhyme that his copy-texts had omitted a line. Once, at 1553, he omitted a line and left a blank space after 1554 at the bottom of the page. The omission of a couplet after line 7121 like similar omissions elsewhere was probably inherited from his copy-text.8 In terms of accuracy he stands alongside the scribe of the Hengwrt copy of the *Canterbury Tales* as one of the most competent hands of his day.
This fine copy of the translation, bound as one volume without any notice of its deficiencies as being one-third of its original length, was printed by William Thynne as part of his collected edition of Chaucer in 1532. Sometime after this printing, possibly after c.1573 when Francis Thynne reported the dispersal and theft of some of his father’s manuscripts, eleven leaves were cut out from his copy-text, MS Hunter 409. Thynne’s edition remained the base of all subsequent editions until Robert Bell used the manuscript (then in the Hunter Museum at Glasgow) for the base of his text in his Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (London, 1854–6). Thynne’s text, universally regarded as Chaucer’s translation, was wrongly assumed to be copied from an affiliate of MS Hunter 409 until the first of the modern editions, by Max Kaluza for the Chaucer Society in 1891.

Kaluza was the first editor of the poem to propose that the extant text was a conflation only part of which was written by Chaucer. The origin of this claim was a letter by Bradshaw to Furnivall, founder of the Chaucer Society in 1868, reporting ‘unChaucerian’ rhymes in the translation. This claim quickly expanded into a larger conception of a conflation of two and sometimes three fragmentary translations (lines 1–1705 by Chaucer, lines 1706–5810 by A. N. Other a northerner, lines 5811–7692 perhaps by Chaucer). The publications which support (and in a few cases challenge) these hypotheses are reported in the Variorum Chaucer, and their views, sometimes qualified and reinforced by other interpretations, are now widely held by editors and critics alike.

Two critical additions to this ME commentary followed the establishment of major subgroups of the French text by Langlois in 1910. First, in 1925 Brusendorff while accepting Chaucer as the sole author of the translation proposed that the so-called Fragment B (lines 1706–5810), linguistically different from Fragment A according to the then current view, was a scribal reconstruction of Chaucer’s text. Secondly, in 1968 Sutherland, accepting the theory of multiple authorship, printed alongside his edition of Thynne’s text a conflated French text based on Langlois’s affiliations where Fragment A followed one French subgroup and the rest of the poem another French subgroup; since this conflation did not match Thynne’s text, Sutherland added other French readings to his text and claimed that the discordanccs between Thynne and his French text were due to a ME reviser of an earlier conflation of Chaucer’s translation with another translation who had access to other French manuscripts. Both hypotheses by Brusendorff and Sutherland were supported by detailed comparisons between ME and French readings of word, phrase, and rhyme which are often worth the reading; and Sutherland’s parallel edition greatly facilitates immediate comparisons of context. But neither hypothesis has found support. Their bibliographical and linguistic arguments are too far from modern perceptions of early fifteenth-century book production to be credible.

The main modern editions before the Variorum Chaucer are those of Skeat
(2nd edn 1899) and Robinson (2nd edn 1957) and its revision in *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston, Mass., 1987). Robinson based his edition on Skeat for the greater part, treating the translation as apocryphal. The major feature of the revision was its acceptance of the discovery, first suggested by Kaluza, that Thynne’s copy-text was MS Hunter 409. Each of these editions became the standard edition of its time, but none was based on an informed linguistic analysis of the manuscript which would have exposed the canard of a northern scribe, nor on an awareness of scribal practice and malpractice in late ME literary manuscripts. Despite extensive emendation in each edition (Skeat 881 variants, Robinson 649 variants, *Riverside* 564 variants) each editor was apt at crucial points to accept a scribal reading as authorial and at times to edit the texts of previous editors rather than the primary evidence of MS Hunter 409 and (for the eleven lost leaves) of Thynne’s print.

The language of the translation was first seriously examined when the survey of late ME written forms began at Edinburgh after 1960. As part of this survey MS Hunter 409 received expert scrutiny at Glasgow, and at Edinburgh departmental papers and seminars explored the complexities of its language. In the event, MS Hunter 409 was not included among the ten manuscripts of the Hunter collection described in *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, I, 88f. Like Miss Prism’s chapter on the fall of the rupee, the findings of those earlier scrutineers were thought too sensational for the purpose.

The absence of MS Hunter 409 from this authoritative survey meant that the traditional view of the translation established by Skeat in 1899 and accepted by Robinson in 1934 and all later editions has held the field, justifying to the present time Skeat’s prophecy in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* I, 6 that ‘it is not possible for future criticism to alter it’. *A Chaucer Glossary*, compiled by Norman Davis and colleagues (Oxford, 1979), confined its attention to the so-called Fragment A (lines 1–1705), a grievous restriction, and even the majestic *Variorum Chaucer* in 1999 has bowed before the traditional view. However, in cognate areas of linguistic studies (the organization of manuscript production, the transmission of text by local and migrant scribes at Westminster in an expanding industry, and the complex hazards of scribal traditions) major advances by major scholars have been achieved alongside *A Linguistic Atlas*. And in their wake fresh appraisals of Chaucer’s poems written before the *Troilus* c.1385 have been undertaken. The time is now opportune to re-examine the text of the translation and the hypotheses which currently surround it.

First of all, it is improbable that another English translation of *Le Roman de la Rose*, almost 22,000 lines, beside Chaucer’s was undertaken. Such work required endurance as well as vision and a long gestation. It also required a thorough knowledge of French language and metrical practice, capable of translating sometimes tightly expressed scholastic ideas into a limited English vocabulary
and poetic tradition. And as the translation of a work of sophisticated literary appeal which was the basis of later courtly love poems in France and England it required a sponsor and an audience. By c.1385 Chaucer’s translation was well known in courtly circles and the emerging book-trade (as noted above) and its later reputation is attested by Lydgate, *Fall of Princes* I.308 after 1430, approximately the date of writing of MS Hunter 409. Moreover, it is hard to believe that two separate ME translations in one homogeneous dialect in octosyllabic couplets, one ending imperfectly in mid-couplet at line 1705 and another beginning imperfectly at line 1706 and ending imperfectly at line 5810, were conflated without textual dislocation, and that a third fragment of 1,882 lines from a much later part of the poem, also in the same dialect and metrical form and beginning and ending imperfectly, was then added by that conflater. Literary conflations of imperfect ME literary texts are extant (e.g. two separate texts of Mandeville and a small subgroup of Lydgate, *Troy Book*), but no such parallel to the bibliographical complexities of these hypotheses is known to have existed. The origin of MS Hunter 409 is most easily imagined as an attempt to preserve a copy of Chaucer’s translation before its total disappearance from the book-trade at Westminster c.1435.

These initial doubts about current hypotheses are strengthened by the high incidence of scribal error noticed by earlier editors. Many of these errors disturb metre as well as sense, and this dual disturbance is also a feature of the additional errors reported in this paper. The importance of metre to the editorial recovery of a scribally contaminated ME poem is, of course, fundamental despite denials in some modern editions of Chaucer. Metre was the essence of late medieval poetry in England as in France, where early poets like Machaut were by calling composers as well as makers and where Deschamps wrote: ‘l’autre musique est appellee naturele … et est vne musique de bouche en proferant paroules metrifiees, aucune foiz en laiz, autre foiz en balades, autre foiz en rondeaux, cengles, et doubles, et en chanbons baladees.’\(^{15}\) For him and his contemporaries the concept of metre was shaped by the musical ‘phrase’ and ‘sentence’, the normal length of a phrase being four ‘measures’ and of a sentence two phrases. In late medieval France there were many variations of forms within song and verse, and Chaucer’s early poems, mostly composed in iambic metres, closely follow the patterns of his French models.\(^ {16}\)

In this context the primary needs of an editor of MS Hunter 409 are to establish its metrical patterns and remove its scribal corruptions. Such restoration of metre and sense enables the language of its underlying text to be more clearly visible. On analysis by means of the *questionnaire* and accompanying criteria proposed by *A Linguistic Atlas* chapters 2 and 3 a homogeneous linguistic underlay emerges beneath its evident ideosyncrasies. This underlay shares many features of early fifteenth-century ME literary manuscripts written by professional scribes.
at Westminster, that is, ‘the language of Chaucer and Hoccleve as established by consensus of manuscripts’ designated Type III by Samuels in his seminal study in 1983.\textsuperscript{17} It has a distinct East Midland element, as a simple comparison between the unmixed languages of two small prose tracts shows: the \textit{Equatorie of the Planetis} (Peterhouse MS 75. 1, written 1392 at Westminster and possibly the nearest extant evidence of Chaucer’s spelling at that date) and Hilton’s \textit{Eight Chapters on Perfection} (BnF, ms. anglais 41, written early fifteenth century by an East Midland scribe).\textsuperscript{18}

Here, for ease of present and future study, the language of MS Hunter 409 is examined in five sections. First, the so-called Fragment A lines 1–1705, not itself a coherent section but central to the hypotheses of Kaluza and Skeat. Secondly, lines 1706–2950 where a natural break (the end of the God of Love’s statement of his code, lines 1922–2950) is marked by the demi-vinet on fol. 57”. Thirdly, lines 2951–3772 where Bialacoil ‘Fair Welcome’ appears and the Lover achieves his desire to kiss the Rose. Fourthly, lines 3773–5810 where the reactions of the guardians and the arrest of Bialacoil are narrated, ending abruptly owing to the loss of leaves in an earlier copy-text. Finally, lines 5911–7685 being a later section of the poem imperfect at its beginning and ending. Here comment on these sections reports their distinctive features. Comments on rhymes are discussed collectively below.

\textit{Lines 1–1705}

Four leaves (lines 1–44, 333–80, 1387–1482) are lost, their text being preserved in Thynne’s edition. The language has the forms recorded by Samuels as characteristic of Type III with these differences: sich/such, moche/mochel, naught/nought/not, thorough (sometimes thurgh), yit/yitt (rarely yet), where his cited forms are swiche, muchel/muchel, not, noght, thurgh, yet. Other variants are ony, other, thenke where the cited forms are any, oother (rarely other), thynke (rarely thenke). One prominent feature is the past participle prefix \textit{y-}, generally suppressed in the extant text but present in its underlay, cf. lines 1396 \textit{yronne}, 1401 \textit{yse}, 1419 \textit{yset} in Thynne’s text where the manuscript lacks a leaf. There are two minor readings to note: line 1655 \textit{att see}, \textit{at} with infinitive is a northern construction but here perhaps an error, cf. lines 1311 and \textit{see}; 1674 \textit{rone}: a northern word ‘bush, thicket’ found in \textit{Marte Arthure} 923, \textit{Gawaine and the Green Knight} 1446, the \textit{Pistil of Susan} 72; but here perhaps echoing the French cognate as in line 16243 ‘Rose on bush nor snow on bough’. As the primary Fragment in these hypotheses these lines have received careful editing, leaving one outstanding crux at 1063 ‘An hundrid haue do to dye’ where the palmary reading is ‘In drede they han ydo to drye’, cf. 3105 ‘he doth me drye’ and the alliterative half-line ‘in drede to drye’; alongside simple errors like 77 \textit{be light}, 103 \textit{swete}, 770 \textit{saillouris}, 934 \textit{writen}, 1092 \textit{byboue}, 1666 \textit{Me}
thankis, 1695 enlomyned, 1705 aboute in place of the better delite, newe, trillouris, wryen, bileue, Methynketh, enlomyned, bisote. The emendation 934 wryen clarifies the following ‘ladyes and bacheleres’ as a variant name of the flower ‘lords and ladies’, an erotic symbol which features in the demi-vinet fol. 57’. Overall, the language of this section is consistent with what may be deduced from other manuscripts of Chaucer’s poems as derivative of his early usage, and this indeed is the general belief. Exceptionally, where doubts are expressed by the theorists they are never supported by linguistic analysis.

Lines 1706–2950

One leaf (lines 2395–442) lost from the manuscript, its text printed by Thynne. The language underlying the extant text is essentially that recorded above, both in archetypal forms and their variants. One feature is a notable increase in the incidence of error in the latter half of this section. In addition to those recorded in earlier editions are

2126 helpyng eke helyng helpe 2592 I trowe in ytrowe in my
2450 yechyng vrchoun, cf. 3135 2619 of hir alloone here alsoone
2473 Thought or whooso The fyf how so 2675 annoy noblaye
2504 gete enchesoun seke accasioun, cf. 2508

The single-leaf fragment (NLS Sutherland Collection, lines 2403–50) contains three better readings (lines 2450 yrchon, 2413 As, 2427 sende) alongside some minor variants. Elsewhere the scribe of MS Hunter 409 has lines 2730 and 4313 slepe for the better wynke, blank lines at 1554 and 1984, and at line 2387 at the end of the line adds as I which properly begins the next line. These variations suggest the possibility of a change of scribe about line 2450 earlier in the scribal tradition.

Since some claim a northern origin for the so-called Fragment B (lines 1706–5810) it is pertinent to list the occurrence of possible dialectal forms outside rhyme in this section. Lines 2183 and 3747 arrn ‘are’ alongside the common ben appear occasionally in the earliest copies of the Troilus and the Canterbury Tales (MSS CCC 61 c.1398 and NLW Hengwrt 392D c.1404) and are unremarkable here. Likewise line 1928 lepande within the line is an unconscious East Midland scribal recall, cf. line 3138, alongside the common -ynge suffixed forms of the present participle. The compound line 2158 othergate, a variant of line 3249 other weyes, may be a deliberate choice before ywys and the loss of final -s scribal, cf. line 332 gate, the common algate, and Plowman A, X.204. The existence of an earlier mare for MS 2709 more in rhyme is editorial since the rhyme more/fore displaces the better mo/go, as at lines 2215f. morelare. None of these variants has any substance in any argument for a northern origin for this part of the poem. The adoption of the French loanword bouton ‘rosebud’ at line 1721 and thereafter
throughout the poem (misspelled botheum, va. bothum, bothom, bothams) in place of the earlier knoppe (lines 1675–1702) is discussed below.

Lines 2951–3772

Two leaves (lines 3595–690) are lost from the manuscript, their text printed by Thynne. The language of the underlay, when scribal disturbances are removed, exactly reflects that of the preceding section. The first part, including the speech and description of Reason lines 3190–304, is comparatively free of error but thereafter they accrue, as these unnoticed examples show:

3319 thought tyght 3417 haue hadde (3 pt. subj.)
3335 Thanne lefte 3429 elles well al youre wil
3335 And thus lefte me 3437 fille... For hilde ... Nat, cf. 239
3336 Forwery Oft wery 3482 for ferforth
3336 forwandred oft wondred 3537 all oute oute of doute
3360 1 bilefte ybilefte

Irregular dialectal forms within the line here are lines 3138 criande and 3747 arn, cf. examples noted in the previous section.

Lines 3773–5811

No missing leaves, two blank lines at 4856 and 5624 marking omissions in the copy-text. Several lines in the latter half of this section lack an iambic phrase or syllable. There are occasional variants. Lines 4396 worche and 5363 sparand alongside the common werk and sparynge. Lines 4537 sheo, 5051 so, 4858 there are possibly miscopied from the common she and ther. The most striking feature of scribal variation is the increased use of arn at lines 4415, 5047, 5114, 5403, 5456, cf. or 5689 and 5745, alongside the common ben; this altered preference in the scribe’s register (if it was the same man) illustrates one way in which spellings change within the copying of a long text. There are a number of corruptions, not recorded elsewhere, in the latter half of this section which, with the iambic omissions, may indicate a new scribal stint:

4191 a bow archers bombards 4986 smerte of swete or, cf. 5059
4411 I feele blede is yfeblede 5056 selle hir by fie hir of
4414 fals falsours 5162 nedis ay nede assay
4532 for to lowe fallowe 5166 of all oueral
4710 awayne to were a wynde to arere 5290 the more therin
4751 slowe flye 5290 were oute of wer withoute
4875 forteneed crece for tencrese 5588 chiche chincheliche
4933 this hangith misgyeth 5639 Atte last it That lastith
Apart from these scribal aberrations the language of this section exactly parallels that of previous sections.

**Lines 5810–7692**

This section, which in the manuscript begins on fol. 115 without a break beyond a paragraph illumination after line 5805 in the ME translation, spans a gap of some 5,500 lines in *Le Roman de la Rose*, first identified by Tyrwhitt in 1775. Four leaves (lines 7383–574) are lost, their text printed by Thynne, who does not notice the disruption of sense at line 5810. The scribe left blank spaces at lines 6025, 6318, 6372, 6688, 6786, 7092, and 7109 where, presumably, his copy omitted lines by error. He himself added in the margins lines 6190, 6609, 7035, 7592 which, again presumably, he omitted in copying. More substantially, a major displacement of text begins at line 16 of fol. 143r where, unnoticed by scribe and Thynne, a bifolium in the copy-text (the third sheet of a quire of eight containing twenty-four lines to the page) was misbound; thus, lines 7109–58 precede 7013–108 and lines 7159–206 follow 7207–302, and the text at each misjoint is slightly disturbed. Each page of this section fols 115v–150r has the headline ‘Falssemblant’ though he and his ‘sermon’ do not appear until fol. 120v.

The underlying language of this section is essentially that of the previous sections, but the spelling is less erratic and the metrical disturbances fewer. Apart from lines 6047 are and 7548 arne the only variant forms are the verbs wirken, wirche at lines 6659, 6662, and 6737. The intrusion of full at lines 6001 and 6243 and the suppression of the y-prefix in past participles occur as earlier in the extant text. Collectively these textual and scribal features suggest that at a later stage in the scribal tradition an ancestor of this section (like that of the Sunderland fragment) differed from those of previous sections of the extant manuscript. In addition to those noted by previous scholars these scribal errors appear:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6271</td>
<td>biwaile be bailed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6821</td>
<td>grete grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7063</td>
<td>vounde formede, cf. 1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7071</td>
<td>Such sleghtes Slinge stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7374</td>
<td>I wot ywrought, cf. 1193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7406</td>
<td>saynt saynge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7406</td>
<td>die en prie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7662</td>
<td>iolyly giltyly, cf. 6355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Linguistic overview**

These summary reports collectively suggest that MS Hunter 409 is a composite of two fragments (lines 1–5810 and 5811–7692) which, beneath their scribal overlays, derive from one copy written c.1405 at Westminster within the professional booktrade. Its subsequent scribal tradition can only be imagined in elementary form, at least four stages which successively introduced disturbances of metre and sense. The archetype from which this assumed copy c.1405 descended is not
at present recoverable. The language of this copy reflected the orthography of Type III in Samuels’s designation noted above, and its common variants (moche, not, ony, siche, thorough, yit) are found elsewhere in manuscripts of that date and provenance. The loss of the y- prefix, the habitual doubling of vowels e, o, and occasionally i to indicate length, and the expansion of eye-rhymes are later features. In this context the few so-called ‘northern’ forms reported above offer no evidence of conflation of two or three translations or non-authorial revisions; they are, at best, unconscious recalls from the original registers of migrant East Midland scribes working at Westminster.

Further study will no doubt clarify the picture by undertaking an index verborum, a detailed description of the extant language, a close record of scribal errors and corrections, and ideally a computer analysis to discover the boundaries of the stints of earlier scribes. Meantime this primary enquiry reveals the main structures of the extant text, and primed by this knowledge its reader can now assess the validity of those claims, based on a perceived presence of ‘unChaucerian’ rhymes, which challenge its integrity.

The rhymes

The extant ME text comprises 7,692 lines, of which 542 are preserved only in Thynne’s print and a further 17 lines are left blank by the scribe and filled later by others. The argument for the presence of ‘unChaucerian’ rhymes is presented by Skeat, Works, I, 5–10 in 1898, computed by Brusendorff in 1924 to total 255 within the larger number of 3,846 of the whole text, and with minor variations accepted by Fenn in the latest report on rhymes in 1990. Discussion of these rhymes is generally particular without reference to their linguistic, textual, and cultural contexts and is in part coloured by an acceptance of the existence of the so-called Fragment B and its alleged external origin, though each of the three scholars named here offers an individual interpretation. A more historical approach to the presence of these ‘unChaucerian’ rhymes offers substantially different conclusions.

Outside the alliterative tradition most English poets had difficulty with rhymes. At the end of his rhymed translations of three balades by Granson c.1380, the so-called Complaint of Venus, Chaucer complains that ‘rym in English hath such skarsete’, which probably reflects his experience in translating Le Roman de la Rose as well as its immediate context of an envoi of ten lines with only two rhymes. To overcome such imbalance between French and English Chaucer had at hand a tradition of rhyme and rhyming practices in popular ME verse, and throughout his poetry adopted many such expedients. In the extant translation of Le Roman de la Rose these devices are used to facilitate rhyme: the suffix -ande in present participles instead of -ynge; assonant rhyme; rime riche; direct
adoption of French rhymes in situ. In some cases where rhyme was elusive the translation expands or contracts the French text by adding or omitting a line, and elsewhere renders a French verb by noun or adjective. These practices became more frequent as the translation progressed.

Further, when one discounts the permissive rhymes observable in ME verse elsewhere and the scribal distortions caused by eye-rhyming and miscopying, the number of impure rhymes cited by Skeat and repeated by others as evidence of multiple authorship shrinks dramatically. In the extant text the number of rhymes which require comment within modern awareness of linguistic patterns and scribal practices to test their authenticity is less than fifty. Examples of permissive rhymes are line 5419 deles (3 pres. sing., cf. Book of Duchess lines 73,257 and Haus of Fame line 425); lines 4504, 4852 tille (prep. ‘to’ cf. line 1037); line 481/2 gardyne/therynne, repeated five times as noted by Variorum Chaucer p. 90, with variable stress. Examples of scribal distortion are lines 506 were, better were; 1853 thore, better tho rhyming with mo; 1857 thar, better ther rhyming with sher; 2216 are, better ge rhyming with mo; 5274 fered, better ferde; 5920 wors, better wers; and the many uncertainties about final -e in rhyme as well as within the line.

Most of the fifty or so rhymes cited as impure by Skeat and others which are not immediately recognizable as permissive variants or scribal distortions belong to two categories. The first rhymes etymological final -y with final -ye in French-loaned nouns, e.g. lines 1849 I/maladie, 1861 hastily/ company, 2179 generally/vilanye. Chaucer uses such rhymes in his parody Sir Thopas, and the practice is common in popular ME romance as reported by Lounsbury in 1892 and Fenn in 1990.20 The second category of the impure rhymes involves the levelling of final -er with -ir, e.g. lines 2547 martire/fiere, 2779 desire/manere. In spoken verse both these categories of rhyme, like assonant rhyme, would have passed unnoticed. A similar rhyme is lines 2005, 2609, 3745 gentilnes/kysse.

Part of the argument based on impure rhymes for multiple authorship concerns their incidence. Thus, the first occurrence of -yl/-ye rhymes is line 1849 I/maladie and the last line 7317 mekely/trechery. The comparatively late appearance of such rhymes at line 1849 is used to support the hypothesis of Fragment A (1–1705), but the presence of the final seven examples at lines 6111, 6301, 6339, 6373, 6875, 7317, and 7571 which are outside the boundaries of the so-called Fragment B is explained as evidence of early craftsmanship or even of the priority of translation of the so-called Fragment C. Such contradictions do not commend themselves. The presence of all permissive rhymes in the ME translation is more credibly explained in the historical context of its composition c.1375 when a young poet undertaking the challenge of translating Le Roman de la Rose, a poem of great authority and sophistication in 22,000 lines of octosyllabic couplets, faced the practical difficulties of rhyming in a less developed literary tradition. Such an undertaking was achieved partly by experiment and partly by an increasing
confidence as he surmounted a succession of difficulties along the way, and offers no support to theories of conflation or revision by others.

The hypothesis of Fragment B

Kaluza proposed his theory of a tripartite structure of the translation primarily to accommodate the presence of impure rhymes. The third part (lines 5807–7692) is tangibly separate, being discontinuous and without beginning or end, but parts A and B in his scheme are continuous, beginning at the beginning of the poem and ending by loss of leaves. Conveniently at hand in the search for the division of these two hypothetical fragments are two internal abnormalities, a scribal corruption at line 1704 and immediately beforehand five occurrences of *knoppe(s)* as a translation of the French *bouton* ‘rose-bud’ between lines 1675 and 1702 after which the French word is adopted without change. The French text lines 1168–71 at the hypothetical division reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{L’odor de lui entor s’espent} \\
\text{La soautume qui en ist} \\
\text{Tote la place replenist} \\
\text{Quant ie loi sentu flaier.}
\end{align*}
\]

The ME translation lines 1704–6 reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The swote smelle spronge so wide} \\
\text{That it dide all the place aboute} \\
\text{Whanne I hadde smelled the sauour swote.}
\end{align*}
\]

In both texts the last line begins a new sentence. In the translation the two middle lines of the French have been collapsed into a single line (a common device throughout). In line 1705 the scribal rhyme *aboute* replaces a syntactically necessary infinitive form after the causative *dide*, and it leaps to the eye that the palmary reading is *bisote* ‘make sweet’ which exactly renders the sense of the French couplet and meets the following rhyme word *swote*. In OE *swot* is a variant of *swete*, and ME *soote* commonly occurs alongside *swote*, va. *swete* in this translation and elsewhere, being an easy and therefore useful rhyme. The rarity of the form *bisote* was perhaps the reason for scribal and later editorial confusion. The error does not mark any change in the language or style of the translation, and an Edinburgh seminar (self and post-graduates, revisited for this paper) did not find any linguistic evidence in an extended examination of the 200 lines before and the 200 lines after line 1705 to support such claims beyond the *knoppe/bouton* translations.

The rendering of *bouton* ‘rose-bud’ in its initial five occurrences in lines 1665–1702 is a valid translation for the sense there of *knoppe(s) clos* ‘unfurled buds’. Trevisa uses the word in his description of the rose in his translation of Bartholomaeus
Anglicus XVII.36 (OUP edn p. 1030/10), and here at line 1080 knoppis are the ornamental studs on the collar of Richesse where the French lines 1061f. do not offer a corresponding noun. But in Le Roman de la Rose Guillaume de Lorris uses bouton in the sense ‘budding rose’ without distinction. The semantic difference is important. After line 1702 the ME text like the French (both quoted above) clearly states that its fragrance is overpowering, but no rose-bud is fragrant. The distinctive bouquet of roses is exuded by the essential oil of its opened petals to attract pollinators. The red rosa gallica, the medieval rose par excellence, is a shrub rose which flowers in June and July in clusters of pale red fragrants; presumably Guillaume de Lorris and Chaucer knew its sequence of growth and blooming. When Chaucer realized that after the first five occurrences bouton in Le Roman de la Rose meant ‘budding rose’ and in herbaceous and metaphorical terms the first fresh opening of its petals, he simply dropped the restrictive ME word and adopted the French word; ME boton ‘ornamental stud or thing of little value’ occurs in Gawaine and the Green Knight line 220 and Plowman B, XV.121, cf. 1080 knoppis noted above. Somewhat by way of confirmation of the newness of the loanword in this sense all spellings in the ME translation are defective (bothum, bothoms, bothon, variants of ME botme). Like the bud the botoun unfolds with the poem.

A similar change of word occurs in the final section of the translation. In the preceding text the personification of the Lady’s affability towards her admirer is named Bialacoil ‘Fair Welcome’, cf. the French Bel Acueill, who appears at line 2984 and frequently thereafter though never in rhyme. In the final section he is called Fair Welcomyng at line 5856 at the start of the line and at line 7522 in rhyme. Though the change has been seen as another sign of multiple authorship, the simpler explanation is that it was made for pragmatic reasons; Bialacoil is metrically awkward, scrabbly vulnerable, and impossible to rhyme. Its non-rhyming appearance at line 5856 suggests that it was an authorial change, probably made earlier in the part of the translation after line 5810 now lost, cf. To Moche Yevynge line 5837 and Wel-Heelynge line 5857. Undermined by the discovery of the homogeneous language of the underlay of the translation, the hypothesis of Fragment B rests on assumptions of ‘unChaucerian’ rhymes, textual fracture at lines 1704f., and revision of two contextual terms which are at best doubtful. Its earliest exponents did not, of course, have the benefits of modern scholarship, but its retention in current editions and commentaries is unjustified.

The translation

Le Roman de la Rose survives in over 200 manuscripts in several states and recensions. The standard edition by Ernest Langlois for the Société des anciens

Chaucer’s French manuscript is not known to exist, and it is possible that he used more than one manuscript or even a conflated text. There are several pointers in the ME text to the state of his French copy. Thus, at lines 3024ff. the ME translation reports three guardians of the Rose, omitting Peor ‘Drede’ as in most French manuscripts, instead of the better four, though Drede appears later. At lines 2185–90, 2301–4, 5471ff., and 6583 it follows passages traceable to the recension of Gui de Mori c.1290 and other sources. At several smaller points it reflects scribal corruptions in the French text; e.g. these words, 2592 ioie, 6281 dieu, 6532 tresime, 7413 son for the earlier and better iour ‘day’, deuls ‘from them’, trenteisme ‘thirtieth’, sanz ‘without’. And throughout there are places where the French text has matter which the ME translation does not, and conversely there are ME lines where the French text is silent. Apart from minor expansions and contractions related to rhyme and image most of these discrepancies seem to have originated in the French text; all are evident in Kaluza’s and Sutherland’s editions. These differences between French and ME texts make all comment on their relation subject to caution.

Judgement about the process of translation has become part of the discussion of its authorship and integrity. Most follow the hypotheses set out by Kaluza and Skeat and distinguish two or three translators. Thus The Riverside Chaucer p. 1103 declares Fragment A ‘a very literal translation’, B ‘a much looser style’, and C ‘more literal’, judgements without supporting argument. Where more informed comment is offered, e.g. by Eckhardt (1984) and Weiss (1985), it is limited to the so-called Fragment A. A more pertinent division would perhaps distinguish between the work of Guillaume de Lorris (French lines 1–4048) and Jean de Meun, though there is no evidence that Chaucer did so. In any case a late ME translation of a French poem has to be seen in the context of contemporary practice in England and, in this particular case, of Chaucer’s other rhymed translations from French verse, fugitive though they are: the ABC adapted from Deguilleville’s prayer in Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine and the
so-called *Complaint of Venus* recast from three of Granson’s balades in a series of five. Both are early work and stay close to their origins but both are English poems, not merely exercises in translation.

Like these short poems Chaucer’s translation of *Le Roman de la Rose* is a close but not always a literal rendering of the French poem. Movement from a Romance language into a Germanic one, however closely associated by vocabulary and syntax, imposed various changes, for example in word-order, expression of moods and tenses of verbs, and imagery of simile and metaphor. And the different demands of the ME octosyllabic couplet required a constant balancing of metre and rhyme. There are few misunderstandings of the French sense despite differences of expression. Where the ME translation is wayward the difficulty has at root a French or English scribal confusion. This clarity is partly achieved by the use of ME idiom and stock phrases and rhymes which preserve the sense, partly by minor expansion or contraction, partly by choice of word in context; the replacement of *knoppe* by *bouton* is noted above, but at less semantically vital contexts *la seeete* is rendered *takel* line 1729, *arowe* lines 1741 and 1862, and *la seeete barbelee* by the *hokede heed* line 1749. The use of rhyme tags, doublets of noun and adjective where the French has a single word and conversely a reduction of French doublets, use of adjective or adverb to convey sense of French verb, adoption of French words like lines 1082 *cheuesaile* and 7096 *equipolences* where there were no English equivalents, all occur throughout the translation. The combined effect imposes a more clear-cut, direct expression where the French is more spacious and stately, especially in the first part by Guillaume de Lorris. The substance is the same but the accent is different, even perhaps Chaucerian, though many such differences of expression are inherent in the languages.

The most important feature of the translation is not, however, lexical but the development of the role of the first person narrator. The poem by Guillaume de Lorris (ME lines 1–4430) stems from the lyric tradition where the reciter before his audience is both author and lover and, in this poem, also dreamer; whereas the continuation by Jean de Meun belongs to the tradition of the *dit* composed more for independent narration or reading. The lyric is more descriptive of emotional mood, the *dit* more accustomed to speeches which argue a case. In the English poem Chaucer is more present as narrator than either French poet in the French poem. The double or triple role becomes his natural mode as a performer as their narrative possibilities of ambiguity open before him. In this poem his more visible presence adds a freshness to the translation, possibly an unconscious display of poetic possession.23

In sum, once the distortions of scribes and editors are recognized the translation is uniformly confident, clear in meaning, and accomplished in metre and rhyme. There is no evidence whatsoever of change of competence or approach
by another translator. If Chaucer's claim in the *Hous of Fame* lines 1878–82 of his own worth that 'I wot myselue best how I stand' rests on *The Romance of the Rose* it is well founded.  

Oxford

MICHAEL C. SEYMOUR

NOTES

8 These corrections and errors are meticulously reported in *Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. Dahlberg. Facsimiles of the manuscript and Thynne’s text with introduction by Graham Caie are available online at www.memss.arts.gla.ac.uk.


This examination of the underlying linguistic integrity of MS Hunter 409 and the errors which have accrued in its scribal transmission rests on the scholarship of the editors and commentators cited above and of former colleagues and its referee who have sharpened its focus in several particulars.