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Considering Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*:

Principles and Processes of Medieval and Present-day Translations

Folio 57v from the Hunter Manuscript, c. 1440-1450, Glasgow University Library

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Table of Contents

1.   Introduction

In the introduction to his *Fables Ancient and Modern*, the poet John Dryden refers to Geoffrey Chaucer as the "father of English poetry" (379).[1] He argues that Chaucer was to the English what Dante was to the Italian literary tradition, showing the poetic capacity of the language and opening the literary tradition of Western culture to the English-speaking world. According to Chaucer scholar Christopher Cannon, over 2,000 English words can be ascribed to Chaucer (meaning that he is the first known source to have used the word in *writing*), and his works have been and remain an important literary source for many authors (129).[2] Moreover, Chaucer's work shapes and characterises the modern understanding of the Middle Ages, and functions as a foundation for the heritage of English language and literature. The unfinished *Canterbury Tales*, a framework narrative consisting of 24 stories of great variety and skill, is very possibly his masterpiece. Most of the stories in his different collections of stories were adaptations of narratives that were important in the medieval literary tradition. Chaucer used many sources for these works, ranging from the Classics, like Boethius and Ovid, to French and Italian contemporary authors such as Petrarch, Boccaccio and Guillaume de Lorris. The exact details of Chaucer's education are unknown, but evidence suggests that Chaucer started working on his first (surviving) literary work after his captivation in the Ardennes around 1360: the *Romaunt of the Rose*.[3] This is a translation of a French allegorical poem which was started by De Lorris, and finished by Jean de Meun.[4] It is an important work for the modern understanding of the medieval literary world and its traditions of translation.

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[1] Joseph Black. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Medieval Period*. Vol. 1. 2nd Ed. London: Broadview Press. 2009. p. 379.

[2] Christopher Cannon. *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998. p. 129

[3] Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Romaunt of the Rose*. In: Walter W. Skeat. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1894.

[4] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. *Le Roman de la Rose*. In: Walter W. Skeat. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1894. p. 93- 164.

Moreover, it is considered a quintessential work within medieval literature. C.S. Lewis, in his influential work *The Allegory of Love*, claims that the *Romance* "as a germinal book… ranks second to none except the Bible and the *Consolation of Philosophy*" (134).[5]

Chaucer must have recognised this importance at an early stage, and decided to make it available to the English-speaking world. Eustache Deschamps, the French poet and Chaucer's contemporary, wrote a ballad in praise of Chaucer, which Szilvia Malaczkov presents in her exploration of Chaucer and translatology.[6] The refrain of this ballad celebrates Chaucer as the "great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer" (35). Deschamps directs us to the importance of Chaucer as a cultural mediator, which is the general aim of all translations.

It is believed that there are three important manuscripts of the Middle English translation: the Thynne Manuscript dating from 1532, which was reprinted several times, the Hunter Manuscript, owned by the University of Glasgow, and the original, which has not been found (yet). At the end of the nineteenth century, Max Kaluza and Walter Skeat identify three different authors in both surviving manuscripts, which has led them to a division of the text into three fragments.[7] Of these fragments, it is believed that only the first is Chaucer's. Skeat is one of the most highly-esteemed sources in this "fragment" debate.

Skeat's division of the fragments and evidence for this division focus mainly on the target text and its implications. It is only recently that researchers show an increased interest in the translation and its relation to the source text and its context. The interest in Chaucer as a translator has not been nearly as great as it should be, considering that most of his work is in fact a form of translation. Dahlberg, who translated the French text himself, and whose translation process I will explore in this essay, was one of the first to pay any real attention to the medieval translation in relation to the source text. Sanchez-Martí's essay "Chaucer's

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[5] Clive S. Lewis. *The Allegory of Love*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1985. p. 134.

[6] Szilvia Malaczkov. "Geoffrey Chaucer's Translation Strategies". In: *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology.* Vol. 9: 1. London: Routledge. 2010.

[7] Walter W. Skeat. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer.* Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1894.

'Makyng' of the Romaunt of the Rose" pursues this with a detailed description of several modern translation principles that can be traced back to what is considered Chaucer's part of the translation.[8] Both Taylor (in his book *Chaucer, Translator*) and Sanchez-Martí briefly touch upon the striking difference between Chaucer's translation principles in this first translation, and some of his later translations and adaptations.[9] Like the source text, the *Romaunt of the Rose* was written in iambic tetrameter couplets, with a rhyme scheme of AABBCC. Furthermore, Chaucer's linguistic and stylistic equivalence to the source text is striking, as his later translations were adorned and altered, using the source text to his own, often quite different purpose.

In this thesis, I will attempt to identify Chaucer's style in the Middle English translation of *Le Roman de la Rose* and examine it in comparison to his own work. I will also consider any influence Chaucer may have had on modern translations of the same text.

This thesis is divided into four parts: firstly, I will explore several secondary sources on Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose* to give an account of what exactly is Chaucer's work and how he came to this translation. Secondly, I will attempt to identify Chaucer's particular style of translation, and see how much of this is evident in the *Romaunt*, his earliest literary work. Thirdly and most importantly, the main body of my thesis will consist of translation reflection. I will compare several passages from Chaucer's *Romaunt* to the French source text and two more recent translations: the first one by Harry W. Robbins, published posthumously in 1962, the second a prose translation by Charles Dahlberg from 1971. Finally, I will venture to formulate a conclusion with regard to the importance of the three translations of the *Romance de la Rose* in the history of translation and literature in the English-speaking world.

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[8] Jordi Sanchez-Martí. "Chaucer's 'Makyng' of the Romaunt of the Rose". In: *Journal of English Studies*. Vol. 3: 2. London: Routledge. 2002. p. 217-236.
[9] Paul Beekman Taylor. *Chaucer, Translator*. Lanham: University Press of America. 1998.

2. Identifying Chaucer's Hand in the *Romaunt of the Rose*

2.1. Walter W. Skeat

Walter W. Skeat, Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge University at the end of the nineteenth century, published a work in six volumes titled *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, one of which was dedicated to the translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose* and several minor poems. Skeat follows up the conclusions of Lindner and Max Kaluza, who identified two clear stylistic and linguistic breaks in the text. These breaks indicate that it is the work of several different authors. He comments on a doubt that their discovery raised: if this translation was definitely not all Chaucer's work, how can we be sure that he had any hand in it whatsoever? Skeat's critical examination comes to the conclusion that "three fragments of English translations have come down to us, of which two cannot be his, whilst the third may be" (10). He continues to conclude that "we may provisionally accept fragment A as genuine; and we find that, the more closely we examine it, the more probable does its genuineness become" (10). His evidence is mainly linguistic, based on dialect differences in the three fragments he distinguishes and on un-Chaucerian habits in the rhyme scheme. The arrangement he obtains through his tests is as follows:

Fragment A	Lines 1-1705	French text lines 1-1678
Fragment B	Lines 1706-5810	French text lines 1679-5169
Fragment C	Lines 5811-7698	French text lines 10716-12564

(3)

The Middle English translation is incomplete in both surviving manuscripts, ending over 9510 lines early and leaving a 5547 line gap between fragment B and C. Skeat's division thus shows that, sadly, a total of over 15,000 lines are missing in the medieval translation.

2.2. Fragment B & C

Skeat subjects the text to several different 'tests'. The first concerns the different Middle English dialects: fragment B shows clear traces of the Northern variant. Although his usual dialect was Southern, this could theoretically have been Chaucer's work. Evidence is his use of Northern dialect features in the "Reeve's Tale" in the *Canterbury Tales*. It has been established, however, that this use was mainly for comic effect, and we would therefore not expect Northern dialect features to be present in other works that are not intended comically. Moreover, because Fragment A (lines 1-1705), which is generally taken to be Chaucer's part of the translation, exhibits no Northern dialect features whatsoever, it is unlikely that fragments A and B come from the same translator. From line 1713 onwards the 3rd person plural pronouns used are, consistently, 'they, their, them', the Northern form. The first occurrence of this feature comes quickly after what is thought to be the change of fragment A to B, line 1705. Before that point, only 'they, hem, hire' are encountered, the hybrid form, which combines Southern 'hem, hir, hire' with the Northern forms. As Chaucer uses the hybrid forms as a standard in his other works, it is highly unlikely that he would use Northern variants here. Furthermore, fragment B displays another Northern feature, one that Chaucer is not known to have adopted in any of his writing, namely the dropping of the inflexional *-e*, usually at the end of the sentence to retain the rhyme scheme. Examples are rhymes such as *spring, thing* (2627), which would be *springe, thinge* in Chaucer, as Skeat explains (4-5).

A second test also concerns the rhyme scheme: the author of fragment B makes frequent use of assonant rhyme (for example *escape, make* 2753), which Chaucer avoids. Furthermore, as Skeat explains, fragment B fails the 'Bradshaw test'. Henry Bradshaw compiled a list of all the rhymes used in poems attributed to Chaucer. This list helped him to establish that the works that are definitely Chaucer's show a clear difference of rhyme from those that are questionable. For example, Chaucer never rhymes words etymologically ending

in -*y* (phonologically represented as [i:] or [ɪ]) with French substantives ending in -*yë* ([i:ə]), such as *maladye* (written without the umlaut, pronounced as four syllables). The author of fragment B, however, rhymes *maladye* with *I* (1849), *worthy* with *curtesye* (2209) and *folye* with *by* (3241), to list but a few examples.

The style of fragment C is more difficult to distinguish from that of fragment A, and consequently was believed to be Chaucer's until the end of the nineteenth century. It does not exhibit many of the un-Chaucerian rhyme tactics, and there is nothing to indicate that the author was of Northern origin, or in any other way connected to the translator responsible for fragment B. However, despite the fact that fragment C is closer to Chaucer's style and language than fragment B, Skeat comes to the conclusion that it cannot be attributed to Chaucer either (8). As evidence, Skeat points to several occurrences of monosyllabic words at the end of a line, where Chaucer would be expected to use an -*e* inflexion. A second piece of evidence is the frequent use of rhymes such as "requestis, honést is" (6039), which Chaucer does not shun completely, but uses far more sparsely than the author of fragment C. These are the most important features that indicate the breaks between the three fragments. Additionally, Skeat presents several other pieces of evidence to support his ideas, but these are more subtle.

2.3. Fragment A

A simple conclusion would be that fragment A, which does concur with all the characteristics of Chaucer's language, is indeed a translation of Chaucer's hand. However, there are critics who doubt that Chaucer had any part in the work as it survives in the two manuscripts. Skeat (who does conclude after a detailed analysis of the work that fragment A must be Chaucer's) presents a good reason for this doubt: all preserved manuscripts that are partly ascribed to Chaucer date from over a century after his death.

Nevertheless, there is one clear piece of external evidence to suggest that Chaucer did translate this work: in *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer refers to his translation of *Le Roman*.[10] Moreover, the *Romaunt* has thematic links to many other works Chaucer produced later in his life. The *Parliament of Fowls* and the *Book of the Duchess* are both dream visions like the *Romaunt*. Additionally, as Dahlberg points out, False Seeming (one of the many personifications presented in the *Romaunt*) gives a speech that is a clear model for that of the Pardoner in the *Canterbury Tales*, and the Wife of Bath's Tale presents a similar character to the Old Woman of the *Romaunt*.[11]

Of course, the translation that has been preserved could not be the one that Chaucer worked on. The fact that we have at least two fragments by other authors suggests that other medieval writers were interested in the poem, so there may have been several translations that were done in roughly the same period. Evidence for the hypothesis that Chaucer was one of the translators of the *Romaunt* as it was left to us also relates to his other works: Skeat repeats all peculiarities he has mentioned in his discussion of the other two fragments, and shows that the "Chaucerian habit is maintained and there is *no* instance to the contrary" (9). He also argues that Chaucer's part is placed where it would be expected: at the beginning. Any

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[10] Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Legend of Good Women*. In: *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1988.

[11] Charles Dahlberg. *The Romance of the Rose*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1971.

translator choosing to continue or follow Chaucer's work would use as much of any existing, and, arguably, very good translation as he could. This would suggest that Chaucer may not have actually finished his translation, which is hardly surprising due to the proportions of the source text and Chaucer's busy personal life and career. Additionally, many of Chaucer's other works are unfinished, such as the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Legend of Good Women*. An explanation for this fact may be that Chaucer is known to have worked on many projects at the same time, both in his literary and his other work.

The fact that fragment A has been ascribed to Chaucer for centuries is not enough to justify the assumption that it was indeed his work. However, the aforementioned evidence and the fact that the work would concur with what is known of his literary development, make it obvious to, as Skeat puts it, "provisionally accept fragment A as genuine" (10). Chaucer's work is important for both literary and translation studies, as it can help critics to look into Chaucer's personal style of translation and writing from an early point in his life, and gives a definitive source for some of his themes and characters. Furthermore, if this was not Chaucer's work, it was the work of an unknown author who sadly did not get the credit he deserved, but who had a very similar style to Chaucer and is therefore equally worthy of being examined.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will refer to Chaucer as the translator responsible for fragment A and any reference to Chaucer's translation of the *Roman de la Rose* in this thesis only includes fragment A, or line 1-1705. It is important to note that these first 1705 lines are all part of Guillaume de Lorris' work; Jean de Meun continues the poem from line 4058 onwards.

3.   Chaucer's Style of Translation

As Dean Fansler explains in his *Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose*, many medieval literary sources suggest that the *Roman* had a great effect on many Italian as well as French writers.[12] It seems natural that Chaucer, who was familiar with the works of many French and Italian authors, should be interested in such an important source of poetic influence. Furthermore, the Romance was one of the most valued genres of the period, so the *Romaunt* is a comprehensible choice of source text for the English poet, fulfilling both generic and linguistic expectations. Interestingly, it is not a genre Chaucer himself seemed to value, as it does not feature prominently in his other works, with "the Wife of Bath's Tale" as a famous but rare exception. Although fragment A is discernible from the other two fragments as being Chaucer's through his rhyme strategies and dialect, the translation strategies and style of rhetoric Chaucer displays in the target text are a different matter, as they are quite atypical of Chaucer's entire body of translation work.

Many of Chaucer's works, such as "the Clerk's Tale" and "the Manciple's Tale" in the *Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus & Criseyde*, *The House of Fame* and *The Legend of Good Women* have been identified as secondary translations, or "vernacular receptions of classical authors through academic commentary" (185).[13] This was common practice in Middle English literature, as Chaucer's contemporaries Gower, Henryson and Lydgate prove. The basic method of translation was that of *allegoresis*: a story with no clear metaphor or with an obscure meaning (often from classical mythology or philosophy) would be adopted to suit the medieval authors' purpose, and converted into arguments for Christian discourse rather than

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[12] Dean Spruill Fansler. *Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose*. Gloucester: Peter Smith. 1965.
[13] Rita Copeland. "Translation as Rhetorical Invention." In: *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature.* Vol. 11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995.

pagan mythology.[14] The reworking was made to function as an *allegory* in its new context. The result was usually a transmission of the source text with little stylistic and linguistic retention, as well as substantial changes regarding the content. The *Romaunt* is diametrically opposed to this practice. The source text already presents an allegory. Consequently, there would have been little point in *constructing* an allegory in the target text.

Eugène Nida argues against the terms 'literal', 'free' and 'faithful' with regards to translation.[15] He proposes a new model for the appraisal of translation, consisting of *formal* and *dynamic equivalence* (159). Formal equivalence does not mean word-for-word translation, which is actually an impossible term, as it would result in completely ungrammatical texts in the target language. Formal equivalence means that the translator "focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content". The message in the target language matches as closely as possible the different elements in the source language. In this first translation of Chaucer's, we can identify this approach. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, indicates that the translator aims to provide his audience with a similar experience to that of the source audience, with room for drastic linguistic and stylistic shifts.

Chaucer's later translations are no longer formally equivalent to their source texts, even though he claims that they are. Sanchez-Martí points out that Chaucer repeatedly expresses his commitment to the "Hieronymic principle". This principle, taken from the work of Classic philosopher Hieronymus, argues for a sense-for-sense translation, without any adornment or allegoresis. In *Troilus & Criseyde*, for example, Chaucer promises to preserve the meaning of his source text:

> And of his song naught only the sentence,
> As writ myn auctour called Lollius,
> But plainly, save oure tonges difference,

[14] Jeremy Dimmick. "Ovid in the Middle Ages: Authority and Poetry". In: *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*. Ed. Philip Hardie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2002. p. 264-287.

[15] Eugène Nida. *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1964.

> I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus,
> As in his song, loo, every word right thus,
> As I shal seyn…   (l. 393-398)[16]

This is a striking quotation in several respects. Firstly, Chaucer's main source for *Troilus & Criseyde* is Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, and Lollius did not even exist. Chaucer's intention was probably the assertion of literary status and authority: a classical source sounds more valid than a contemporary, vernacular source. Secondly, as Sanchez-Martí argues, Chaucer breaks his promise vigorously. Although *Troilus & Criseyde* is very similar to *Il Filostrato*, Chaucer imposes his "intentio upon the sense of the author or the *intentio auctoris*, and it results in the manipulation of the *materia* that Chaucer found in his sources [i.e. Boccaccio]" (219). The result, according to Sanchez-Martí, is not merely a translation of Boccaccio's version of the legend, but a new version of a popular story, in which Chaucer has absorbed the original matter and "cast it in the mould of a new *intentio auctoris*" (219).

Another example is *Boece*, Chaucer's translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, for which he used both the Latin original and a French translation by Jean de Meun. Chaucer translates a verse source text into prose, supposedly to achieve a more formal equivalence (as Dahlberg has with the *Romance*). Simultaneously, as Malaczkov argues, he adapts the text to fit his purposes and beliefs, and arguably, also that of his audience, by "trying to make Boethius seem more Christian in English than in Latin, for although Boethius was a Christian, it was logic, not theology, which was of central importance to him" (42). Chaucer also repeats and emphasises the passages and ideas that he deems most important. In his translation of Boethius, Chaucer thus minimises the 'foreignness' of the source text by erasing any features that could be considered too pagan or Ancient; this practice forms an important feature of dynamic equivalence.

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[16] Geoffrey Chaucer. *Troilus & Criseyde*. In: *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1988.

Chaucer does not do this in all his translations; often, he uses the exotic elements for educational purposes and for valorisation of the source culture (usually ancient Rome or Greece) compared to the target culture (medieval England). Again, this implies that Chaucer imposes a new *intentio auctoris* by emphasising pagan or exotic elements. It is important to note that the source culture for the *Romance de la Rose* was a Christian society with strong historical, linguistic and political links to England in the fourteenth century. Consequently, the difference between the source audience and the target audience did not go far beyond a linguistic level. Chaucer would have found it easier to achieve formal equivalence in his translation, as the source text contained only few features that required explanation for the target audience. Chaucer did not convert the text to suit a new context, nor to serve a new purpose. In short, the fact that the *Romaunt* is such a different translation from Chaucer's later work is more than a reflection of his growing literary knowledge and ability, as it also reflects the nature of his very first source text.

The imposition of a new *intentio auctoris* was not a part of the translation process for the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and this makes the work one of the only instances where Chaucer adheres to the Hieronymic principle of sense-for-sense translation, as he often falsely claims he did. The high formal equivalence of the translation does not allow for the addition of an argument or purpose on Chaucer's behalf. As Sanchez-Martí points out, there are some instances of minor alteration of the original, usually used to make imagery more compatible with the English literary tradition (227). However, as this was closely related to and influenced by French literature, the examples are few and subtle.

Chaucer's main purpose for this work seems to be a reassertion of the English language, and sharing the great stories of other countries and cultures with the English-speaking world, which is typical of his oeuvre. After his (partial) translation of the work, the *Romance de la Rose* certainly did not leave Chaucer's mind: Fansler points out that many

elements of it can be found in his major works, including the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame* and the *Canterbury Tales*. In these works, he had further developed his literary style and uses his sources to serve a new purpose, drawing upon them to fit his *intentio auctoris*.

4. Comparison to Modern Translations

4.1. Introduction to Modern Translations

In this chapter I will reflect on two modern translations of *Le Roman de la Rose* and compare them with Chaucer's translation. The first translation I will focus on was done by Harry W. Robbins, published eight years after his death in 1954.[17] This is a verse translation, but Robbins has changed the French four-beat rhyming couplets into a five-beat, unrhymed line of blank verse. As his editor, Charles W. Dunn claims in the introduction to the translation, Robbins was "thus able to follow the involutions of the poet's argument without contortion or inaccuracy" (xxviii).[18] He divides the verse into one hundred chapters, which are not found in the French text.

The second translation I will include in my study is Charles Dahlberg's prose translation, published in 1971. In her critical guide to the French text, Sarah Kay calls it "the most reliable English-language translation".[19] Because it is a prose translation, its form is a clear step away from both the source text and Chaucer's translation. The fact that the reader is presented with a prose text makes a significant difference to its reception. On the other hand, not having to adhere to a rhyme scheme and metre gives the translator more freedom of word choice and syntactical structure, which makes the translation process easier and could result in a more faithful translation.

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[17] Harry W. Robbins. *The Romance of the Rose.* Ed. Charles W. Dunn. Toronto: Dutton & Co. 1962
[18] Charles W. Dunn. "Introduction". In: Harry W. Robbins. *The Romance of the Rose.* Ed. Charles W. Dunn. Toronto: Dutton & Co. 1962. p. xxviii.
[19] Sarah Kay. *Romance of the Rose.* Vol. 110 of *Critical Guides to French Texts.* London: Grant & Cutler. 1995.

4.2. Chaucer in Robbins and Dahlberg

Although they used the same medieval French source text, Chaucer was faced with different translation problems from the two modern translators. Middle English was both grammatically and lexically very different from Modern English, and many words entered the English language in the 600-year gap between Chaucer and the other two. Robbins and Dahlberg could have copied Chaucer's word choice or would at least have access to a much larger vocabulary for their translation. Chaucer presents many new words for the lack of a satisfactory translation of the French. Vinay and Darbelnet proposed seven translation strategies in their influential *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de L'Anglais*, of which several result in the introduction of new words into the target language.[20] Chaucer seems to use two of these: borrowing, in which the word is taken over in its original form and meaning to fill a semantic gap in the target language, and calque, in which a source language expression or structure is transferred in a literal translation. Vinay and Darbelnet note that both forms of translation often result in words that are fully integrated in the language, although sometimes with some semantic change, which can lead to the existence of 'false friends'. In the words Chaucer has introduced, this is a common occurrence.

Out of approximately 50 words the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) attributes to the *Romaunt of the Rose*, I will focus on three borrowings that are regularly used in everyday-speech, and locate them in Chaucer's text.[21] Moreover, I will examine whether they are present in Robbins and Dahlberg. As a first example, we find *tissu* (Modern English 'tissue') in line 1104. This is a borrowing of the French *tissu* in line 1090 of the source text. Robbins retains tissue, whereas Dahlberg speaks of a 'cloth', which seems justifiable, as 'tissue' in its

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[20] Vinay and Darbelnet. *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de L'Anglais: Méthode de Traduction*. Paris: Didier, translated by J.C. Sager and M.-J. Hamel as *Comparative Linguistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 1995.
[21] The *Middle English Dictionary*. Eds. Hans Kurath et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1952. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/about/>. First accessed on 12-02-2013.

modern use has connotations of paper handkerchiefs and bodily fibres. A second example of a

borrowing is Chaucer's translation of *reverdie* in line 712, an old form of 'reverie', as

reverdye (or, in the Hunter Manuscript, *reuerye*). The modern definition *the Oxford English*

Dictionary (*OED*) gives for 'reverie' is "a state of being pleasantly lost in one's thoughts; a

daydream", which is linked to the text as a whole rather than the Middle English and French

meaning of "delight, wild conduct".[22] Dahlberg, again, avoids the modern connotations by

using 'joy', which has no strong association with dreams. Robbins changes the sentence

structure, and uses "sweetness and contentment" to express the same positive sentiment. Also

water-syde (l. 129) can be seen as a borrowing translation of *pié de l'iaue*, which literally

means foot of the water. This was an Old French idiom, which none of the translators have

retained. Chaucer may have used 'side' rather than foot for rhyming purposes. Dahlberg uses

"edge of the water", and Robbins opts for "water's edge" which is more an *equivalence*.

One feature for which Robbins has clearly used Chaucer as a source is in the

translation of personifications, which are abundant in De Lorris' description of the Garden.

For instance, 'Déduit' is introduced in line 721. Dahlberg opts for Diversion, a literal

translation, without trying to make the character appear more human. Chaucer calls this

character "Sir Mirthe" (725), which makes him sound like a courtly knight. Moreover, Mirth

seems much more innocent than Diversion, which has connotations of being tempted to stray

from the right path, and is reminiscent of the Fall of Men. Robbins has "Sir Mirth", like

Chaucer, and Robbins also copies Chaucer in personifications to follow, unless the Middle

English word is outdated or carries unfitting connotations.

With the exception of this last feature, I believe most similarities between the three

translations result from individual choice rather than copying from Chaucer. Dahlberg, in his

notes, never mentions the *Romaunt*, but only refers to the two French manuscripts he has

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[22] S.V. 'Reverie'. Oxford English Dictionary. http://www.oed.com/. Accessed 12-02-2013.

used. Robbins does mention Chaucer in the introduction to his translation, but does not confess to having used it. An important reason a translator could have for looking at the earliest verse translation is to use the same or similar rhyming couplets. There are a few elements that the translations have in common, such as Robbins' "Sir Mirth" and other personifications, but as neither Robbins nor Dahlberg employ a rhyme scheme, it is unlikely that Chaucer's translation was the main source for these two modern versions.

4.3. Comparison of Translations through Four Principles

In this paragraph I will compare the translations of Chaucer, Dahlberg and Robbins, using lines 635 to 730, which correspond to the passage in Skeat called "The Garden" as well as the much shorter "Sir Mirthe" (l. 645-742). Skeat's edition principally follows the Hunter Manuscript, but it has been collated with the Thynne Manuscript and corrected in places. Skeat always provides the reader with the original words, and any relevant alterations will be taken into consideration. In Dahlberg, the passage runs from line 631 to 726, which is part of chapter 1 titled "The Garden, the Fountain and the Rose". This passage is useful in its variety: it includes strong imagery, but also introduces a few characters and describes some actions. Furthermore, it features a self-reflective paragraph, in which the line between author and narrator is blurred. To give a short summary of the passage: the dreamer enters a garden, led by the personification of Idleness, and sees many birds, singing softly and sweetly. He expresses his love for Idleness for bringing him there, and starts to introduce the character of Diversion, who sits in the garden with a group of beautiful, angelical people.

I will approach this comparison through four main principles that are relevant to the passage I have examined: repetition, ambiguity, listing and wordplay. Although there are, of course, more elements that can be looked at for comparison of the translations, these four seem appropriate as the translators have chosen distinctly different approaches.

4.3.1. Repetition

The source text uses many repetitions. One type of repetition is the use of synonyms to express one sentiment. An example: in line 638, the French text reads: "Je fui liés et baus et joiens." These are three synonyms, all meaning 'happy' (the last word is a gerund, i.e. 'rejoicing'). Dahlberg follows the original structure: "I was happy and gay and full of joy" (633). Robbins' "my joyful heart was filled with happiness and sweet content" (75-76) does not follow the structure as rigidly as Dahlberg, but does make it a three-fold expression of pleasure, expanding it to cover two verse lines. Chaucer, however, reduces the sentence to a single expression of joy with a personification of the heart: "Myn herte was ful glad of this" (646).

A second repetition is Guillaume de Lorris' very frequent use of the word *sachiés*' in this passage alone it occurs three times. It is the Old French form of 'sachiez' (second person plural form of the verb 'sacher'), meaning 'know'. The source text repeats the same word, but the translators must have deemed this too repetitive, for all three of them give several different translations of the word. Robbins even uses three different clauses for the word:

French line number	Chaucer	Robbins	Dahlberg
639	trusteth well	you may right well believe	believe me
669	trusteth well	truly	know well
682	certes [certainly]	you may well know that	know then

Every single translation has the same function as the *sachiés* in the source text: giving emphasis and asking the reader's faith in the story. However, the repetition in the French text also works like a marker. The translators have chosen to make the target texts less repetitive, but in doing so all three have eliminated this aspect of the source text.

Another frequently encountered form of repetition in the source text occurs in the rhyme scheme, where Guillaume de Lorris employs the same word twice in rhyming positions, a rhyme form called *identical rhyme*. Chaucer, as Skeat noticed, avoids using identical rhyme (even in different word classes or meanings) wherever he can in his verse. In the passage I have examined, Chaucer's translation has no instances of identical rhyme, whereas De Lorris' has three. However, these three instances all concern homonyms, where the spelling and pronunciation are the same but the meaning is different in the two sentences. The rhyming of homonyms was identified by Kaluza as a device that Chaucer did use; for example, "present… present" in lines 1191-1192 of the *Romaunt*. It is hardly remarkable that Chaucer does not retain the homonym rhymes, as it would require the same semantic ambiguity of the homonymous word in its English translation. Robbins and Dahlberg do not use the same word in their translations of the identical rhymes, as the French homonyms are not matched in Modern English.

4.3.2. Ambiguity

There is some strong ambiguity in the passage of lines 695-704, which mainly has to do with the identity of the dreamer or the 'I' of the poem. This passage gives a short outline of what is to follow, and expresses the dreamer's belief that the way he presents it will not displease the reader. All three translators retain this ambiguity. The function of the passage seems to be to convince the reader that the dreamer and the poet are the same person, and that this is a narration of real occurrences. Some elements of the translations emphasise this: Chaucer translates "comment j'ovré" as "how that I wroughte" and Robbins uses "I will versify". The passage stands out, as it breaks the dream. It brings to mind one of the first passages of the poem, in which the dreamer explains his reasons to write this poem. In Dahlberg, this seems rather ironic: "Now I wish to tell this dream in rhyme, the more to make your hearts rejoice, since Love both begs and commands me to do so." The poet and the dreamer do seem from this first paragraph onwards to be united, and the later passage serves as a reminder of this. Caroline D. Eckhardt argues that Chaucer's translation emphasises the presence of the narrator, by making the tone more personal. She claims that Chaucer heightens the sense of the narrator as a present spectator in the poem by describing the images as things he is looking at directly. Eckhardt identifies this change as a "linguistic, translative necessity" (52), as the English requires the presence of a stated subject more often than De Lorris' French does.[23] Sanchez-Martí gives an example from the introduction of the poem: "Ce est li Romanz de la Rose,/Ou l'art d'Amors est tote enclose" (l. 37-38) is translated by Chaucer as "It is the Romance of the Rose,/In whiche al the arte of love I close" (l. 39-40). Chaucer's alteration, the change from a passive to an active sentence structure, gives the narrator a more direct presence in the poem and emphasises the close relation between author and dreamer. Robbins and Dahlberg both retain the passive.

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[23] Caroline D. Eckhardt. "The Art of Translation in the Romaunt of the Rose". In: *Studies in the Age of Chaucer.* Vol. 6. 1984. p. 52.

4.3.3. Listing

The passage that I use to compare the three translations includes a list of birds. The list in the source text comprises 14 species, if you count *mains oiseaus* or 'other birds' as one. The following table shows the species in all three translations. The numbers that precede the English birds show the order in which they are presented in that particular translation.

Source text (649-662)	Chaucer (657-665)	Robbins (3.85-94)	Dahlberg (p. 39)
1. rossigniaus	1. nightingales	1. nightingales	1. nightingales
2. gais	-	4. jays	2. jays
3. estorniaus	-	3. starlings	3. starlings
4. roietiaus	-	6. wrens	4. wrens
5. torteroles	5. turtles	5. turtledoves	5. turtledoves
6. chardonnereaus	3. finches	7. goldfinches	6. goldfinches
7. arondeles	-		7. swallows
8. aloes	6. laverokkes	2. larks	8. larks
9. lardereles	-	10. tomtits *	9. titmice
10. calendres	7. chalaundres		10. calendar-larks
11. melles	-	11. merle	11. blackbirds
12. mauvis	10. mavys	12. mavis	12. redwings
13. papegaus	-	13. parrots	13. parrots
14. mains oiseaus	-	14. other birds	14. other birds
	Additions: 2. alpes 4. wodewales 8. thrustles 9. terins	*Additions*: 8. doves 9. thrushes	*No additions*
14	10	14	14

* The tomtit can refer to two different birds, one of which is indigenous to New Zealand; the other is more common in England, and is also referred to as titmouse.[24]

[24] Jean Crossman. "What kind of bird is known as a 'tom tit'?" *RSPB Website.* <http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/expert/previous/tomtit.aspx>. Accessed 05-05-2013.

Dahlberg follows the source list closely, retains the order and makes no additions, which is consistent with his approach to the rest of the text. The other two, however, make some interesting changes to both order and content of the list.

Robbins presents the list through a repetition of "here were…", presenting two species per line. To retain his metre, he balances out three-syllable birds with single-syllable species ("nightingales… jays", "turtledoves… wrens" and "goldfinches… doves". The source text does not include the repetitive "here were", but lists the birds without adornment. The additions Robbins makes, doves and thrushes, are common birds, so are understandable and rather unremarkable choices.

Chaucer adds the "alpe", commonly referred to as the bullfinch, the "wodewale" or woodpecker, the "thrush" and the "terin" (identified by Prof. Newton as the siskin or aberdevine). The woodpecker is remarkable in this list, as it is not considered a songbird. It does produce a distinctive sound, of course, but the other birds on this list are all known for their pleasant whistles and trills, or friendly cooing. An obvious reason why Chaucer replaced the birds on De Lorris' list is the rhyme scheme: nightingales is paired with wodewales. However, the other three additions do not form rhyming pairs, as "alpes", "thrustles" and "terins" do not come at the end of the line. Perhaps Chaucer did not know translations for these birds, or needed species with shorter names in order to follow the iambic tetrameter, which means that there are four iambs (unstressed syllable, stressed syllable) in each line. In line 665, the names of the birds follow this rhythm perfectly:

ˇ – ˇ – ˇ – ˇ –
"And thrustles, terins, and mavys"

The English names of De Lorris' list of birds may have been incompatible with this metre, so Chaucer used the names of other common songbirds to fit his needs.

4.3.4. Wordplay

In the source text, Guillaume de Lorris plays with words in the comparison of the birdsong to sirens:

> A chant de seraines de mer,
> Qui par lor vois,
> Qu'eles ont saines
> Et series, ont non seraines. (…)

Saines combined with *series* seems to automatically form *seraines*, a nice pun as *seri* means 'clear' and *sain* means 'pure', two words that can be related to the voice. In his translation of these lines, Chaucer makes a remarkable addition:

> But it was wonder lyk to be
> Song of mermaydens of the see;
> That, for her singing is so clere,
> Though we mermaydens clepe hem here
> In English, as in our usaunce,
> Men clepen hem sereyns in Fraunce. (677-684)

Chaucer uses the same idea of relating the word *siren* to the sound they produce, but the word *siren* only appears in the English language around the time of this translation, and thus requires an explanation (*mermaydens*). However, as *siren* did not have the connotation of loud noise in Chaucer's time that it does have in Modern English, the logic of his association is obscure. In reversed order, his explanation for the French name is "men clepen hem sereyns in Fraunce, for her singing is so clere", which seems to be a *non sequitur*. Robbins stays closer to the source text in the structure of this passage. He uses first 'mermaid', then 'siren', and relates 'siren' to the word 'serene'. Although this is etymologically incorrect, it makes more sense in English than Chaucer's relationship of sirens to the word 'clear'. Dahlberg retains 'siren' in both instances; there is no risk of misinterpretation, as 'sirens of the sea' indicates that it does not refer to the sounds of ambulances and police cars.

4.4. Reflection on Three Translations

It is important to note that these two modern translators present the translation in full, not stopping after 12,564 lines, like the Middle English translation,. This gives them a natural advantage over the medieval manuscripts, as these do not provide the poem in its entirety. This also raises the question whether this makes Chaucer's work on fragment A redundant.

Dahlberg's translation is without a doubt the most accurate on a lexical and grammatical level, and this was exactly his aim: in the introduction he says that he wants to provide "a clear, readable text that is as faithful as possible to the original, particularly in terms of imagery." He has achieved this by disregarding the rhyme scheme and metre. On an academic level, I agree that this is a useful device. However, his translation is a dry and unattractive text in a literary sense. It lacks the rhythmic flow of the source text and the other two translations. Also, the prose form he chose seems to emphasise the repetitive nature of the source text. In poetry, repetition is a common device, but in prose, it does not serve the same (positive) purpose. In his introduction Dahlberg also explains that he wants to help his readers to "approach the poem with an approximation of the perspectives of that time", which is almost a definition for *dynamic equivalence*, trying to provide the target audience with an experience similar to that of the source audience. Dahlberg's translation thus serves as a good companion for readers of the source text struggling with Old French, as it can be traced back to the source text almost word by word.

For a modern reader, Chaucer is much harder to understand than Dahlberg, although it will still be easier than the Old French. The English language has evolved significantly since the period of this translation, and many words seem to be left 'untranslated'. Consequently, it is not very useful in the same sense as Dahlberg's work. However, as a text in its own right and as a translation aimed to function as such, Chaucer's part of the *Romaunt* is generally accurate and pleasant to read. His use of rhyme is exemplary, and highly inventive. Nowhere

in the passage I examined does he stray from the source text, except for the occasional explanatory stanza, as we have seen in the case of the 'sirens'. This can be seen as a device for *foreignisation*, but nowhere else in the poem does Chaucer refer to the fact that the source text is French, nor does he mention the original authors. Furthermore, he does not add any moral or philosophical opinion to his translation, as he is known to have done in many of his later works. His aim seems to be to present this great and influential poem to the medieval English-speaking world, by providing a sense-for-sense translation and helping his readership by explaining or changing French terms, but without changing the message of the text.

In his translation, Chaucer often uses what Vinay and Darbelnet refer to as *transposition*, which "involves replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message" (36). They argue that this proves Chaucer's fidelity to the sense of the original while avoiding a word-for-word reproduction. This is partly what distinguishes Chaucer from Dahlberg. Chaucer has taken the liberty to move word class and word order around, but manages to retain both rhyme, metre and sense of the source text, whereas Dahlberg uses transposition only when necessary to avoid French-sounding English. Although all three translators were presented with the same linguistic problems in the translation from Old French to English, Chaucer does not restrict his alterations to those that are linguistically necessary.

Robbins is less dry than Dahlberg, both in its presentation and its poetic style, but still lacks the rhyme which makes Chaucer's work so ingenious. He seems to have adopted a few features of Chaucer's work: this could stem from an appreciation of Chaucer's translation strategies, or be a coincidence. No two translations will ever be the same, but the occasional use of a similar structure or the same word by Robbins, Dahlberg and Chaucer seems logical and even hard to avoid, because they translated the same poem into two forms of English that are syntactically and lexically very similar.

The function of translation changed significantly from the period of Chaucer's translation to the period in which Robbins and Dahlberg published theirs: in Chaucer's time, translation was often used as a device to present famous or unknown works in a new light, as we can see in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, *Canterbury Tales* and other works by him and his contemporaries; it provided the author with a basic story to impede a new *intentio auctoris* on. In this respect Chaucer's *Romaunt* is remarkable in its fidelity to the source text, and its atypical adherence to the source text's message.

It is important to keep in mind that the source text is Old French, which would be equally difficult to read for modern-day speakers of French as Chaucer's language would be for speakers of Modern English. Reading Chaucer's translation is a challenge, but one worth taking on, as the Middle English poem excels in its use of rhyme and metre, and gives modern readers a good sense of the time of the medieval *Romance*. Robbins, despite his lack of rhyme, provides us with a reliable translation that is stylistically similar to Chaucer's, and can be referred to for the remainder of the poem.

5.   Conclusions

It is sad to think that part of what was long believed to be Chaucer's work, and therefore a rich source of information on his style and literary background, is most probably not of his hand. However, this has not stopped scholars from using the *Romaunt of the Rose* as a basis for research, as there is no doubt that Chaucer did translate this poem at some point, maybe even the full 22,000 lines of it, and the work is often approached as such. There is evidence that Chaucer must have known the complete source text. Fansler, for example, uses quotations as evidence for Chaucer's borrowing from the poem in his later works not only from fragment B and C, but also from the lines stretching beyond the Middle English translation. This borrowing is extensive, and both Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun indubitably had great influence on Chaucer's literary style and content.

Chaucer's translation is distinctive in its lack of an *intentio auctoris*: he was known to use sources to serve his own literary purposes, and even in his largely faithful translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, he alters the text to make it fit his own ideas and his society's values better. Studies by Eckhardt and Sanchez-Martí show that the *Romaunt* does not include many alterations at all, and the changes Chaucer made are often subtle and linguistically necessary, and they do not impede the conveyance of the source text's message. From my comparison of Chaucer's translation with two very different modern versions, a blank verse translation by Harry W. Robbins and a prose translation by Charles Dahlberg, it can be argued that many alterations Chaucer made stem from his choice to adhere closely to the rhyme scheme and metre. This element is also the paramount reason for my preference of Chaucer's version: Dahlberg's is the most linguistically accurate of the three, but loses all sense of poetry, both in the text and in its presentation. Robbins seems to have used Chaucer occasionally, but does not reflect Chaucer's inventiveness and wit in his blank verse.

Chaucer's translation is far from complete, it was written in Middle English, which is not a form that speakers of Modern English can automatically follow, and it is not as funny or diverse as the *Canterbury Tales*. These are only three of many reasons for a relative neglect of the *Romaunt of the Rose* over the years, even though the French source text does receive a lot of critical attention. If Chaucer's translation is considered, this is usually in relation to his later works. I must admit that it can be unsatisfying for readers that over 15,000 lines of the source text are missing, and that those 4,000 lines of Middle English that we do have are inconsistent in style because they are not all of the same hand. However, the genius of Chaucer's first and most faithful translation renders these arguments invalid. Robbins' translation has already failed to stand the test of time and fallen into oblivion, and Dahlberg's translation is usually approached as a tool rather than a literary text. Chaucer's translation is the only one never to have lost its value as both a translation and a poem. I fully agree with C.S. Lewis who argued that the *Romaunt* was more than a build-up to the *Canterbury Tales*, being an important part of literary and translation history in itself. Furthermore, it had a major influence on Chaucer's complete oeuvre, and consequently deserves to be approached as a major part of that oeuvre.

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