

MARION UHLIG, Université de Fribourg
 “X-RATED LETTERS: When the ABC turns you on”
 in *The Politics of Obscenity at the Age of the Gutenberg Revolution:
 Obscene Means in Early Modern French and European Print Culture and
 Literature*, dir. Peter Frei et Nelly Labère, New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 60-78
 DOI: 10.4324/9781003083214-6

Il portoit aussi en sa devise,
 G, le ♥ a,b,c
 pour dire, j'ai le cœur abaissé ;
 mais son cousin, au lieu du ♥ qu'il effaça,
 y peignit le Dieu des jardins [*i.e.* Priape].¹
 [*He also had in his motto,*
 “G, le ♥ a,b,c”
to say, my heart is lowered;
but his cousin, instead of the heart be erased,
*painted the God of the Gardens (*i.e.* Priapus) there.]*

According to the Biblical tradition, medieval alphabet poetry pursues a spiritual purpose. Notably, the French ABCs that emerged between the 13th and 16th centuries mostly take on the appearance of prayers to the Virgin, where each letter of the alphabet is the initial of a consecrated epithet of the Marian praise: A for *Ave*, B for “Bonne” (= Good), C for “Courtoise” (= Courty), D for “Dame”, E for “En toi” (= In you), F for “Fleur” (= Flower”, G for “Glorieuse” (= Glorious), *etc.*² But what happens when this poetry, moved by a parodic impulse, turns away from its encomiastic and edifying purpose, and puts itself at the service of the lowest bodily needs? Around 1500, the letters turn obscene in poems that upset the immutable alphabetical succession and, instead, sing the charms of the Q (= ass), the gluttonous appetite for the chicken’s L (= wings) and the drunken games of the D (= dice). In other words, and according to Tabourot des Accords’ formula quoted above, the ABC “s’est a.b.c.” (lowered) from heaven to earth, even below.

This article wishes to investigate these “X-rated” letters and the issues of their poetical celebration. For by overmotivating in this way the letters of the alphabet, hence the elements that properly constitute poetry, these obscene texts never betray the metapoetic vocation that characterizes the Marian ABC tradition: their way of determining symbolically the letters, that is to say the atoms of writing, always refers to the writing itself, and therefore to education and knowledge - or to their reverse? - and also to graphic and material performance.

Therefore, for what narrative, political and cultural purposes did some poets of the 15th and 16th centuries abandon the Mother of the Word and the aura of knowledge that surrounds her, in order to focus on much less ethereal realities which could be associated with non-knowledge, even with counter-power? And what about the correlation between the symbolism of the letters on the one hand, and on the other hand the graphic and material support of writing in the age of the Gutenbergian revolution? I will intend to answer these questions by analyzing two poems particularly emblematic of this period, composed one before and one after the epistemological

¹ Etienne Tabourot, *Les Bigarrures du Seigneur des Accords (Premier Livre)*, Fac-sim. of the 1538 ed., notes by Francis Goyet (Genève: Droz, 1986), p. 24.

² These quotations are to be found in the ABC medieval French corpus currently studied and edited by the Project “Jeux de lettres et d’esprit dans la poésie manuscrite en français (XII^e-XVI^e siècles)”, financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation and directed by Marion Uhlig. <https://www3.unifr.ch/mediaevum/fr/recherche/projets/jeux-de-lettres.html> This corpus contains l’*Abécé par ekivoche* by Huon le Roi de Cambrai, l’*ABC Notre Dame* by Ferrant and l’*ABC Plantefolie* (13th century); l’*ABC a femmes*, l’*ABC contre ceulx de Metz* by Asselin du Pont-à-Mousson and its answer by Lambelin de Cornouailles, the ABC prayer to the Virgin of the *Pèlerinage de vie humaine* by Guillaume de Digulleville (14th century); l’*ABC des doubles* by Guillaume Alecis, la *Ballade de l’ABC* and the pangrammatic poems of ms. Paris, B.N., fr. 12475, ff. 3v-4r (15th century).

shock of the invention of printing. The first poem, the anonymous *Ballade de l'ABC*, composed in the 15th century and designed to be transmitted through handwritten manuscripts, is obviously the model for the second poem, *L'Alphabet du temps présent*, falsely attributed to Clément Marot and meant to be printed from the moment of its composition around 1530 on.

I would like to propose a close reading of these two poems, both reproduced in the *appendix* of this article, through a comparative approach. To do so, I aim at understanding the enunciative status, the meanings of the letters and abbreviations, as well as the address to the addressees.

Nowadays school

In both poems, the stanzas contain seven octosyllabic lines with rhymes ABABBCD, the last two lines of which forming the chorus. While the first poem, that calls itself a ballad, has seven stanzas and no dispatch, the second has eight stanzas which vary the rhymes but keep the same refrain. The *Ballade*, published by Pierre Champion in the *Revue de philologie française et de littérature* in 1907, is part of an anonymous corpus of “Pièces joyeuses du XV^e siècle”, while the *Alphabet du temps présent*, sometimes attributed to Clément Marot, was first published in 1534 with the complete works of this author.³

Both testify to the craze for letters games and puns that labeled at first the mannerist production of the Grands Rhétoriciens, then was celebrated by the 16th century polygraphs, among which the printer Geoffroy Tory, whose *Champfleury* (1524-1526) provided a manifesto on the design of the characters, and Tabourot des Accords which, in his *Bigarrures* printed in 1572, attempted to produce an encyclopaedia of letters games.⁴ This intense production tended to decrease in the 16th century, vituperated as it was by authors such as Rabelais at first, then Montaigne, who considered these poetical acrobatics as a “sale corruption” (= dirty corruption). Nonetheless, we acknowledge the importance of this prolific letrist tradition, as far as French language is concerned: between the 13th and 16th centuries, more than a dozen ABC poems were written; and despite their diverse scope, sometimes devotional, sometimes satirical, they can be gathered together as a corpus thanks to numerous common features.⁵ Among them, let's mention the *Abécé par ekivoche* by Huon le Roi de Cambrai (13th century), which proposes an axiology of the letters, each symbolically characterized; the *ABC des doubles* by Guillaume Alecis (15th century), attentive to the duplicity of language through equivocal rhymes devoted to each letter of the alphabet, and Jean Molinet's *Dictier des Franchois et Gantois* (15th century), who depicts war by scrambling the letters of the alphabet: all three pieces result particularly useful for decoding our two poems.⁶ For these, because of the numerous obscene puns they contain, are particularly difficult to understand; we can't decode them without intertextual help provided by the other texts of the French ABC corpus. The symbolism of the letters themselves, but also the topic of exordium, the structural organization and the final opening of the two poems are obviously influenced by this tradition of writing.

³ The poem appears in 1875 in the *Œuvres* by Clément Marot edited by Georges Guiffrey, but in a section entitled “Œuvres d'auteurs contemporains attribuées à Marot” (= Works of contemporary authors attributed to Marot) (Paris: Librairie de l'art français, 1875, vol. II). Already in the 1534 volume printed by P. Rosset in Paris, it is placed with the compositions of uncertain provenance: “S'ensuyuent aucunes oeuvres qui sont de la façon dudict Marot” (= There follow texts that are in the manner of Marot's).

⁴ “Les *Bigarrures* sont certainement ‘la première entreprise de classification systématique des jeux de mots’” (= the *Bigarrures* are certainly the first systematic word-play classification endeavor) or, in Tabourot's own words, a “grammaire plaisante” (= a pleasant grammar) (Tabourot, *Bigarrures*, VII-VIII).

⁵ Cf. note 2 and the articles to be published by Olivier Collet, Yan Greub, David Moos, Thibaut Radomme, and Marion Uhlig in the special issue “Les poèmes abécédaires en français (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)”, edited by Thibaut Radomme, in *French Studies*.

⁶ See Huon le Roi de Cambrai, *Œuvres*, I: *ABC, Ave Maria, La descriptions des relegions* [1913], edited by Arthur Långfors (Paris: Champion, 1925²), 1-15; Guillaume Alexis, *ABC des doubles*, in *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Arthur Piaget and Émile Picot (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1896-1908), I, 1-54; Jean Molinet, *Dictier de Franchois et Gantois*, in *Les Faictz et Dictz*, ed. Noël Dupire (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1936), 205-8.

Yet, the close reading I would like to propose does not claim to shed light on all the grey areas left by these texts. However, I will at least intend to unveil their obscenity and reveal what is at stake. I propose to get back to some of the problems exposed by the editions and former commentaries of these poems, in order to discuss – and if possible resolve – them, but above all in order to understand how and for what purpose coarseness serves alphabetical metareflexivity.

The opening stanza of the *Ballade de l'ABC*, as a sort of exordium, sets out the conditions of enunciation and the pedagogical ambitions of the poem. The ballad begins with the claim of an I who pretends to have become a “clerc d’escolle” (= scholar) thanks to his knowledge of the “croix depardieu” (= Christ-cross row, ll. 1-2), that is, the ABC.⁷ The irony is thus perceptible from the second line, inasmuch as the cross or crosslet “depardieu” is the conventional sign that introduces the pedagogical alphabets; therefore, it only indicates the mere knowledge of the alphabetical order, for one who already considers himself a clerk, in other words a wise scholar.⁸ The “voulenté saige et folle” (= wise and foolish will, l. 3) that inspires the self-designated clerk, remindful of Villon, evokes the liberties he’s willing to take, and in fact will take, in making use of the alphabet. The rhyme “escolle : folle” is quite explicit: between “wise” and “foolish”, he chooses the second epithet. We understand that the knowledge the clerk refers to – the verbal form *scay* appears twice (ll. 2 and 5) – can be summed up in a “si tres beau jeu” (= such a beautiful game), that is to say, what one expects to find in every “aultre lieu” (= everywhere) but in school.⁹

The first stanza of the *Alphabet du temps présent* is different. The title, straddling the first two lines, immediately informs us about the transitory and secular nature of learning. Above all, it does not in any way concern the enunciator, who distances himself from learning by nominally incriminating the responsible for such an inanity: “Monsieur maistre Jehan Favet”, whose name alone fills the space of the third line. The impersonal address to “Qui veult apprendre l’alphabet” (= who wants to learn the alphabet) guarantees the poet an overlooking position that keeps him away from the addressees and potential future students. By creating a second enjambment after the one of the first two lines, “L’escolle / De monsieur maistre Jehan Favet” (= the school of my lord master Jehan Favet, ll. 3-4) sounds like a direct accusation, towards a character whose real identity has not been possible to find.¹⁰ Unless (and in contrast with Thibault d’Aucigny in Villon’s *Testament*) “maistre Jehan” is a fictional invention whose Latin-sounding surname, *Favet*, embodies the lightness of the *carpe diem*, by designating in him “he who is favourable”, “he who approves”, in short “he who enjoys the present time”.¹¹

On the other hand, I’m not sure what the fourth line means: “Bailler la colle” could mean “put someone in the position to do something, give someone the desire to do something”, or “give a pretended job, transmit a false pretence” depending on the meaning attributed to “colle”¹². In both cases, the master is made responsible for the inclination of the disciple, with an aggravating

⁷ About the Christ-cross row, see Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, “La lettre volée, Apprendre à lire à l’enfant au Moyen Âge”, *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 44, no. 4 (1989): 953-992 and “L’arbre à alphabet”, in *L’Arbre. Histoire naturelle et symbolique de l’arbre*, ed. Michel Pastoureau (Paris: Le Léopard d’or, 1992), 127-43, as well as, for the Italian tradition, Francesco Novati, “Le serie alfabetiche proverbiali et gli alfabeti disposti nella letteratura italiana de’ primi tre secoli”, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 15, no. 1 (1890): 337-401. For the French Medieval and Renaissance texts mentioning it, see among many others Jean Molinet, *Dictier de Franchois et Gantois* and Tory’s *Champfleury*, *Tiers Livre*, XXXI.

⁸ As Jeanroy pointed out in his corrections to Pierre Champion’s “Pièces joyeuses”, the comma between *croix* and *de par Dieu*, or *depardieu*, is superfluous: the cross does not designate a cabaret sign as suggested by Pierre Champion (“Corrections aux ‘Pièces joyeuses du XV^e siècle’”. *Revue de philologie française et de littérature* 22 [1908]: 68-69), nor an equivocation on the Credo as suggested by Cornilliat, later revised by Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet (Cornilliat, “*Or ne mens*”: 400), but the mere alphabet.

⁹ On the learning of the ABC at school in the Middle Ages, see Alexandre-Bidon, “La lettre volée” and “L’arbre à alphabet”.

¹⁰ According to Guiffrey, it could be some “maître de la Basoche” whose avarice provided a pretext for this banter (499).

¹¹ FAVET, FAVEO, -ES, -ERE, “be favourable, favour, be interested in” (Gaffiot, online).

¹² DMF: *colle* < KOLLA “glue” or *cole* < CHOLE “bile, one of the four cardinal humours of the body”.

factor if the second meaning is privileged: in this case, attending school appears like a false or pretended vocation and can be understood as an usurpation. As for “recoler” (= to check by a new examination, to question once more), the word corroborates the school atmosphere of the stanza, while attributing to the teacher, in indirect discourse, the refrain that ends it.

At this stage, the interpretation of the refrain punctuating these initial stanzas remains uncertain. From the *Alphabet du temps présent*, we can assume that “en tout l’A.B.C. / N’a bonne lettre sinon G” (= in the whole ABC, there is no such good letter as G, ll. 6-7) aims at summarizing the teaching of the inconsistent and primesautier master who says it. The ballad brings some tangible elements, since the final G of the refrain (l. 7) resonates with the initial *je* (= I) of the cleric (l. 1) as much as with the *jeu* (= game) that is the alphabet (l. 5): egocentrism or banter, which one is at stake here? It depends on how we read the lines, at least until other possibilities emerge in the rest of the poems. For the time being, we shall retain the diverging orientations the two compositions give to this paradoxical praise: one ironically praises in the first person the merits of a very shabby pupil, the other distances itself in order to denounce the ineptitude of a very bad master.

When the letters go down the drain

The medieval alphabet in French traditionally consists of twenty-three letters (I and J count as one letter, as do U and V, and W is not considered as a letter), occasionally followed by two or three tironian abbreviations, such as 7 (“et” = and) and 9 (“com, con”), as well as “tilde” or “title” which replaces whether N or M. Now, as I have tried to show elsewhere, the French poems usually respect scrupulously the order as well as the completeness of the ABC.¹³ Such an alphabetical perfection thus provides an ideal framework for prayer. In fact, the majority of the French alphabetical texts between the 13th and the 16th centuries are Marian praises which figure the enumerative layout of the ABC in the form of a path or a way. Texts such as the *Abécé par ekivoche* by Huon le Roi de Cambrai, the *ABC Plantefolie*, the *ABC Nostre Dame* by Ferrant and the ABC prayer of the *Pèlerinage de vie humaine* by Guillaume de Digulleville assimilate the alphabet to an itinerary that must be completed in its entirety and compare it to the right path to salvation. In contrast to this well-established tradition, some political poems deliberately upset the alphabet in order to depict the chaos of the world through the war among the letters. Such is the case with Jean Molinet’s *Dictier de Franchois et Gantois*, which describes the disorder caused by the internal struggle between Maximilian of Austria and his son Philippe of Flanders:

Nostre abc estoit par ordre mis,
N’a pas longtemps, en paisible assemblee,
Mais pour lors est tant toullié et transmis
Que bons amis deviennent ennemis,
Sy qu’il y a tres horrible merlee.¹⁴
[Our ABC was put in perfect order,
Not long ago, in a peaceful gathering;
But now it’s so stirred up
That good friends have become enemies,
So that there’s a terrible quarrel.]

The anarchy within the alphabet, “qui est l’ordre même” (= which is the very order), is a perfect illustration of the disorder of the world.¹⁵ Of course, it is not like this in both our poems; however, it is no doubt significant that they omit several letters, invert the order of some of them, and

¹³ See Marion Uhlig, “La lettre sauve. L’ABC et la louange mariale”, *French Studies*, to be published.

¹⁴ Jean Molinet, *Dictier de Franchois et Gantois*, ll. 73-77.

¹⁵ See Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, “L’alphabet des poètes. Rêverie des poètes médiévaux sur la lettre”, in *Belles Lettres. Les figures de l’écrit au Moyen Âge/ Figurationen des Schreibens im Mittelalter*, ed. Marion Uhlig and Martin Rohde, with Luca Barbieri and Pauline Quarroz (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2019), 179-92.

disregard most of the sequential devices attested for the period.¹⁶ In the linearity of the text, the *Ballade de l'ABC* sheds light on the following letters or sequences: str. 2 A (l. 8) / EFGHIK (l. 10); str. 3 D (l. 15) / B after O (ll. 17-18); str. 4 L (l. 22) / N (l. 23) / M (l. 24) / O (l. 25) / Q or perhaps PQ (l. 26); str. 5 R (l. 29) / X (l. 31) / S (l. 32); str. 6 9 / *vit* (l. 40); str. 7 9, not to mention the G of the refrain which punctuates every stanza. The parodic purpose is obvious: by instilling small but unmistakable irregularities in the alphabetical order and completeness, the poem alludes to the traditional vogue of the alphabet, but at the same time distances itself from it. As for the *Alphabet du temps présent*, the same structure is preserved, including the refrain, but with a few variations: stanza 2 retains only A (l. 8) and K (l. 10), stanza 3 retains D (l. 15) and B (17) and replaces O with C (l. 18); H is moved to stanza 4 (l. 22) before N (l. 23), L (l. 24) and M (l. 26), and O is moved to stanza 5 (l. 32), just after Q, duplicated in QQ (l. 29), and before P (l. 33). R (l. 36), S (l. 38) and two V (l. 39) take place in stanza 6, X (l. 43) and Q (l. 46) appear in stanza 7, while Z or 9 (l. 50), depending on the edition, closes the poem in stanza 8. In both poems, the deviations from the canon, slight but repeated, and therefore significant, seem to be clearly calculated. If there is a path, as they seem to suggest, the letters that pave it are nothing but irregular, as if to force the reader to stumble over them.

In fact, the A repeated three times is already questionable: it “ébahit” (= amazes) the clerk of the ballad as much as it makes the “disciple” of the *Alphabet* “rire” (= laugh). AAA, what does that mean? According to Geoffroy Tory, at the beginning of every alphabet “y a comunement une crox, & trois A” (= there is commonly a cross row and three A’s) in honor of the Trinity. This triple A interpreted as a hiccup or a stutter by the clerk of the ballad is a sign of “félicité” (= happiness) in the *Champfleury*, and of “bon eur et bonne joie” (= happiness and good joy in an *ABC des songes* (= *ABC of dreams*) of the 13th century.¹⁷ Actually, it matches with the first sequence reproduced in most of the hornbooks, primers alphabets and pen tests of the 15th-16th centuries, corresponding to the first lesson for children in learning letters.¹⁸ This confirms the reading of the first lines: the “I”, decidedly a bad schoolboy, questions his teacher and belittles his teaching, which, however, is nothing but canonical. The EFGHI and K continuation proves that he has learned a fragment of the ABC, but the sequencing does not correspond to anything recommended by the pedagogical ABCs. Moreover, he treats these letters with fantasy: far from edifying him, they have him “ung peu le cuer resjouy” (= they made his heart a little happier, l. 11).

At that point the refrain of the ballad occurs as the consequence of the *je* (= I)’s own choice: having “tout veu et ouy” (= seen and heard everything), he rejects knowledge in favor of the opposite camp. When he elects the G as the master letter of his truancy’s ABC, he makes the choice to praise non-knowledge and, with it, recklessness and possession: G can be read both as *gai* and *j’ai* (= gay / I have). Two rebus from Picardy, pointed out by François Cornilliat, underlie this reading by drawing a “geai” (= jay), that can be read “gai” (= gay) in the dialect from Picardy, as well as “j’ai” (= I have) in French: « vous me verrez *gai* sur le banc » (= you will see me *gay* on a bench) et « *j’ai* mis de la peine à l’avoir » (= I went to a lot of trouble to get it).¹⁹ Tabourot’s *Bigarrures* confirm this, if need be: “Un G d’or & un G d’argent, signifie de mesme J’ay d’or, J’ay d’argent, car on prononce jé au lieu de j’ay” (= a G of gold and a G of silver mean the same as “I have gold”,

¹⁶ Danièle Alexandre-Bidon notes several sequencings such as ABC/DEF/GHI or ABCD/EFGH and so on, but none of them corroborating those of our poems (“La lettre volée” and “L’arbre à alphabet”).

¹⁷ “La cause pourquoy on escript plustost trois A, que deux, ou autre, est encores signification de felicité, car le nombre de Trinité est non per, & entre tous les aultres nombres le plus noble & parfait.” (= The reason why we write three A rather than two, means once more felicity, since the number of the Trinity is uneven and, among all the numbers, the most noble and perfect). The *ABC des songes* is in the manuscript Modena, Bibl. Estense, XII.C.7 (Fonds étranger, Nr. 32), f. 17, from the 14th century, edited by Walther Suchier, “Altfranzösische Traumbücher”, *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 67, no. 2 (1956/1957), 129-67 (162-3).

¹⁸ Alexandre-Bidon, “La lettre volée”.

¹⁹ Jean-Claude Margolin and Jean Céard, *Rébus de la Renaissance : des images qui parlent* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986, vol. 1), 40-1, and Cornilliat, “Or ne mens”, 387-481.

“I have silver”, because one pronounces *je* instead of *j’ay*).²⁰ Finally, in Huon’s case, the G means the earthly *goie* (= joy), to be pronounced also in the dialect from Picardy; it must be distinguished from the other joy, that of the J, which comes from heavens.²¹

However, one is tempted to qualify this interpretation somewhat according to the second poem. For in Pseudo-Marot’s first stanza, the disciple is no longer a nonsense; on the contrary, his laughter (l. 9) establishes a complicity with the reader at the expense of the ignorant master. The apokoinou syntactic construction of lines 8 to 10 makes us wonder about the very object of this laughter, though: is it the AAA or the KK? Probably both, and in so doing it suggests an equivalence between what the master says and what the goslings shout. It must be admitted that the triple A, seen from this angle, is really unsuitable to illustrate the Trinity; should it rather be considered as Tabourot des Accords does in its *Bigarrures*?

Une maistresse qui tenoit une jeune fille en son escole, donnoit contentement
ainsi a entendre a sa mere, la façon dont elle se gouvernoit :
Vostre fillette en ses escrits
Recherche trop ses aa.
[...]
On l’interprete ainsi.
Vostre fillette en ses escrits
Recherche trop ses appetits.²²
*[A teacher who kept a young girl in her school, made her mother happy by telling her
how her daughter behaved:
Your little girl in her writings
Looks too much for her aa.
[...]
That’s how we interpret it:
Your little girl in her writings
Looks too much for her appetites.]* (“a petits” = “small A’s”)

The context, close to that of our two poems, invites us to retain this second interpretation. In the *Alphabet*, it is further confirmed by the analogy already mentioned between lines 8 (“Quant le maistre dit AAA” = When the master says AAA) and 10 (“Des oysons qui crient KK” = goslings shouting poop”), enhanced by the syntactic parallel. Moreover, the master’s appetite is on the one hand mimically reproduced by the nestlings with gaping beaks, and on the other hand inverted in favour of its natural consequence, dejection. The word *chiabrena* (l. 12), curiously absent from the DMF but well attested to by Rabelais, confirms this reading; it also makes a fool of the master whose teaching focusses on the entry and exit of the digestive tract.

However, none of this is spectacularly surprising given that, during the Middle Ages, the learning of letters took on an alimentary symbolism, more precisely a nutritional one, which is adequately expressed by the word *norreture* in Old French, which means both “food” and “education”. No doubt the food alphabets described by Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber illustrate this double purpose by a “satiating” syllepsis, recommended in the textbooks of the time: “Formate delle lettere in frutte, berlingozi, zucherini et altri cibi puerili, incitate il fanciullo con essi prometterli dargleli, s’egli li conosce, dicendoli questo torto è uno S...”²³ Good food, honey and other delicacies thus symbolize education. Perhaps it’s no coincidence, then, if craftsmen used to carve the alphabet on leather belts: it was meant to prevent the expansion of science from leading to the expansion of the belly. Conversely, in the fable of the wolf at school, which was widely disseminated in the Middle Ages, the progress of knowledge is threatened by the

²⁰ Tabourot, *Bigarrures*, 10^v.

²¹ Huon, *Abécé par ekivoche*, ll. 93-6 and 111-30.

²² Tabourot, *Bigarrures*, I, 17.

²³ Quoted by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “Le chiavi fiorentine di Barbablù: l’apprendimento della lettura a Firenze nel XV secolo”, *Quaderni Storici* 57 (1984), 765-92.

greed of the animal, which can hardly spell the letters of the alphabet and only repeats “agneau, agneau” (= lamb lamb)²⁴:

Col lop quant vol de letra appendre,
 E anch null temps nol poch hom far entendre,
 Ne *A* ne *B* ne *C* ne *D* ne *L*,
 Mays solament « anyell, anyell, [anyell]. »²⁵
 [This woolf wants to learn letters,
 but no one can ever make him understand
A, nor *B*, nor *C*, nor *D*, nor *L*,
 but only “lamb, lamb, lamb”.]

The poet of the *Alphabet* accomplishes the prowess of reproducing identically and on the same lines the refrain of the ballad, “Je treuve qu’en tout l’ABC / N’a bonne lettre sinon G” (= I think that in the whole ABC, there is no such good letter as G), but presents it as the result of this gastrointestinal thinking. The *je* (= I), who appears here for the first time, assumes the overlooking position suggested in the first stanza: confronted with the mutability of a science ingested and then evacuated, that is to say “au pis le pire” (= at worst), we might as well bet on the permanence and tangibility of the G = *je/j’ai* (= I/I have). Let’s not forget that it is about the G, decidedly rejoicing, that Geoffroy Tory makes his digression on the rebus: “plaisanteurs & jeunes amoureux [...] en faisant le *A* plus petit que le *g* & le mettant dedans ledit *G*, puis disent que c’est-à-dire : ‘J’ay grant appetit’.” (= jokers and young lovers, by making the A smaller than the G and putting it inside this G, say that this means: ‘I have a hearty appetite’).²⁶ This rebus consonates with our two poems, perhaps more with the second one, right in tune with this food analogy.

The *Ballade* and the *Alphabet* are unanimous in considering the D as a “mauvaise lettre” (= bad letter). However, the reason why is probably not, as Jeanroy thinks, because it is the initial of the Latin *debet*.²⁷ Rather, and much more simply, it is a question of dice, another game played by our school clerk and his confreres to a very bad end (*Bal*, l. 16). Here, line 16 of the *Alphabet* completes its counterpart in the *Ballade* by explaining the cause of such an “injure” (= insult): playing dice, in fact, “fait emprunter à usure” (= makes one borrow from usury). Either in the drifting world of the pupil in the *Ballade*, or of the teacher in the *Alphabet*, D is no longer the letter-figure of the Most High it used to be in Huon’s *Abécé* (“Et D retesmoingne le forme / De Diu ki tout le monde forma” = And D stands for the image of God who created the whole world, ll. 58-59), but on the contrary the letter-figure of chance. Hence D, far from promising salvation to the believer, constantly puts salvation back in play and, moreover, threatens to squander the G. In this case, we might as well prefer the B, as the poet declares. But if the latter is much better, it is only if it is placed “après O par ordre et mesure” (= after O by order and measure, *Bal*, l. 18). OB: are we supposed to understand it like Tabourot does, when he adds an I after OB in the sequence G.A.C.O.B.I.A.L. (“j’ai assez obéi à elle” = I have obeyed her enough)? It is tempting to believe so, as the B would appear as an antagonist of the D in the axiology that the poet sets (even if no letter will ever be able to threaten the supremacy of the G). Moreover, OB could refer to the Latin preposition *ob* that means, according to the Gaffiot’s, “for, in return for”, and often appears in an economic context, such as *ob beneficium* “in return for a benefit”, *pecuniam ob absolvendum accipere* “to receive money for absolution” or *ob rem* “in return for a real result, with profit, usefully”. Indeed, the pecuniary connotation of this preposition seems to be particularly adapted to the stanza on the game of dice and the usury loan. Also, it could be a reference to the *obit*, the funeral service or the mass celebrated for a deceased person each year on the anniversary of its death, or just as well to

²⁴ We can also think of the K, which signifies the prelates’ belly in Huon’s *Abécé par ekivoche*, ll. 131-148.

²⁵ Berenguer d’Anoia, *Mirall de trobar*, ed. Jaume Vidal i Alcover, 112-4. Palma: Publicacions de l’Abada de Montserrat, 1984, 112, ll. 354-7.

²⁶ Tory, *Champ fleury*, XLII.

²⁷ Jeanroy, “Corrections”.

the French abbreviation for *obole*²⁸ (= obolus). In both cases, we deal with the same pecuniary universe, since one pays for an *obit* and one pays for the tribute mass; furthermore, let's not forget that the obolus is a coin. Thus, it seems that the OB seeks to offset the damaging effect of the D. The dice game leads to ruin, but as long as one “bee haut” – has high ambitions – then one will be able to win the OB, *i.e.* either the obolus, that is the just wage of one's trouble, or an *obit*, the costly insurance of eternal rest. Under the guise of parody and obscenity, these texts evoke the eternal tension between the ephemeral material pleasures and the eternal spiritual wealth.

But then, why does the *Alphabet* swap this convincing OB binomial for the alliance of B after C? CB, as long as it is not a printing error for OB, corresponds to the Latin abbreviation for *cujuslibet*, *i.e.* “anyone, anything” in the genitive case, but to my knowledge not to any French abbreviation.²⁹

As for the homonymies in the fourth and fifth stanzas, they definitely wallow the letters in the mire. This time, the *Ballade* and the *Alphabet* go hand in hand; the *je* (= I) has disappeared, the sentences are now impersonal, except for the refrain of the first poem. Does this mean that there is no one to assume the vices meant by the sinful and insolent letters? After the game of dice, gluttony, barbarism and scatology are now celebrated. The L defies the Marian tradition which saw in it the initial of “livres, lettres et loi” (= books, letters and law) and becomes the best piece of meat, the “aile” (= wing) of a “chapon gras” (= fat cap), that goes very well with an N of river, that is to say an “asne”, the female duck.³⁰ The H – “hache” (= axe) – will be used for this purpose as a very uncourtly meat slicer or a barbaric weapon against thieves. Thank God, only the elevated M (“âme” = soul) manages to rise from these muddy waters. As we see, the *Alphabet* excels, and even surpasses its model, at figuring this tumbling through rhymes which are pure equivoques *in absentia*. While the ballad, once again, merely reduces man to his entry and exit doors, that is to say the mouth (“O s'esmerveille tost ou tard” = the O marvels sooner or later, l. 25) and the ass (“par Q vente tonne et espart” = out of the ass, it's windy, it thunders and it all scatters, l. 26), its 16th century's rewriting shifts entirely upside down. In the *Alphabet*, not only the Q is repeated as QQ to designate the buttocks³¹ at the opening of a stanza entirely dedicated to it (ll. 29-35), but also the O is now placed right between them. What about the P, blustered by the alliteration “poulsent petz” (= fart)? If, in lower case, the Q graphically inverts the P of *paradise*, as it is the case in Huon's, then there is no doubt: the “trou maudit” (= cursed hole) is indeed Hell.³² As climax in both poems, these stanzas say a lot about the importance of obscenity in their provocative rhetoric, regardless of the stakes: it is thanks to obscenity that the bad cleric of the ballad reaches “au fort de [s]on ABC” [= at the top of his ABC], while the poem of *le temps présent* professes obscenity to justify its up-to-date title (“Les QQ troussiez gros [&] espais / ont fort *au iourd'hui* le credit” = big and thick tucked-up buttocks are very valuable these days, ll. 29-30, emphasis added).

Is it any wonder that the next stanza is more honestly phrased, as François Cornilliat points out? After the school clerk of the ballade has reduced the alphabet to an obscene noise, and his epigone of the *Alphabet* has exaggerated its scatological character by devoting an entire stanza to it, it seems inevitable to get back to a more measured discourse. This is the role of the R even if, despite its moralizing character, it proves powerless to stem the flow of obscenities. Rather, the R admits it, through a universal comment: “R tout le monde” (= everyone wanders)³³, whether “par erreur” (= by mistake) or “par congnoissance” (= by knowledge). In this case, the ignorant is freed

²⁸ *Thélème*: “Dictionnaire des abréviations française”, École des chartes, <http://theleme.enc.sorbonne.fr/dico.php?lettre=O>

²⁹ See Adriano Cappelli, *Dizionario di abbreviature latine ed italiane usate nelle carte e codici specialmente nel medio-evo* (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1899).

³⁰ See Huon: “Letres, langaiges, loi ensamble / Senefie L, ce me samble” (= L, it seems to me, means letters, languages and law all together, *Abécé par ekivoche*, ll. 165-6).

³¹ DMF

³² Huon: “Se li Q ne fust bestornés, / En guise de P fust tornés” (= If Q wasn't inverted [in lower case], it would look like a P, *Abécé par ekivoche*, ll. 225-6).

³³ “maint ung”, tempers the *Alphabet* (= many of them, l. 36).

from any responsibility for the decay of the century. As a matter of fact, the meaning of *erreur* in Middle French, here enhanced by the *annominatio* with R=*erre*, means “doubt”, “uncertainty”, “wandering” but not “taking what is false to be true” nor “making mistakes deliberately”, as in Modern French.³⁴ In contrast, the holder of the *congnoissance* (= knowledge), which eloquently rhymes with *desplaisance* (= displeasure, l. 32), is the perfect defendant because of the knowledge he has acquired; he’s guilty of insider trading, so to speak.³⁵

Thereupon, the *Alphabet* is much more measured. By associating the wandering of the R with the “temps présent” (= present time), as if it were the evil of the century (l. 36), it condemns it as an overcautiousness born of deficient or incomplete knowledge. One may hesitate on the proposition “pour un peu de sçavoir trop cuide”: does it aim at denouncing the presumption of the ignorant (because he knows very little, he thinks he is allowed to do anything), or on the contrary the arrogance of those who boast of their erudition (because he has some knowledge, he believes he is the master of the world)? The dichotomy “un peu/trop” (= a little bit/too much), as well as the general context of the poem, leans towards the first option. It is indeed the lack of knowledge, and not the overconfidence that flows from knowledge, that is denounced here. Next comes the S. In the *Alphabet* again, the first S designates a verbal form, as did the R: “S = *Est-ce heresie qui à present / Nous faict de LL l’oultre cuide?*” (= Is it heresy which now / Gives us the arrogance of LL?, ll. 38-39). In itself, S doesn’t provide much information. However, it involves one or even two other signs in its wake. First VV, hence a V plural – or a W, although it is not considered a letter of the French alphabet at that period – means *buy* (= today) according to Tabourot des Accords.³⁶ This enhances the previous proposition as well as the adverbial phrase “à présent” (= nowadays, l. 38), while both echo the title of the poem. I wonder whether *heresie*, whose occurrence is rather surprising, should not be restored by the sequence RSI in the edition: was it originally the case? The choice of the word, to signify what deviates from established beliefs or knowledge³⁷, seems to be motivated more by the joke of the pun than by the context of the stanza, otherwise devoid of any religious allusion. The *Ballade*, for its part, plays on the sinuous form of the S: opposite to Huon’s “lettre saintisme” (= holy letter), here S is committed to ease, that is to say to comfort and temporal well-being.³⁸ For once, the text takes on a moral tone by constructing the S as an antiphrase: the world “quiert [aise] en desplaisance” (= is at ease in displeasure, l. 32), as says the oxymoron that follows to designate the curves of the S, “L’ung recule l’autre s’avance” (l. 33). The S, in short, is an aporia; in everything, then, it yields it to the G, the only tangible value here below.

What’s going on with the X? This sign seems rather crafty to me, and I am surprised Cornilliat considers it so obvious that he doesn’t give any explanation.³⁹ First, are we dealing with the letter X – to be pronounced *iks* or *igs* as in modern French, or *ieus*, *ius*, rhyming with *lieus*, as in Huon’s?⁴⁰ – or with the abbreviation X, which means “Christ” and/or designates the cross as in the majority of the French ABC poems?⁴¹ We must admit that the strophic context of the *Ballade* leans in favour of Huon’s: X = *ieus*, here understood as “yeux” (= eyes), is appropriate to illustrate the wandering of the R by a adynaton equivalent to the S’s, that is to say “[ieus] a tel qui ne veoit ne neant” (= some have eyes and yet see nothing, l. 31. Moreover, it echoes the Isaiah’s anathema,

³⁴ DMF

³⁵ This conception echoes Pierre Abélard’s *Scito te ipsum*.

³⁶ “L S trop ses VV ouvers”, or “Et laisse trop ses huis ouverts” (= and she leaves her doors open too much, Tabourot, *Bigarrures*, I, 17v).

³⁷ DMF

³⁸ Jeanroy is probably wrong again, when he interprets it like the Latin sentence “*esse quierte?*” (Jeanroy, “Corrections”).

³⁹ Jeanroy offers a funny, but illogical, explanation: “peut-être les béquilles dont les aveugles se servent; x figurerait ces béquilles entrecroisées” (= perhaps the crutches used by the blind; X would show these crutches intertwined, *Ibidem*). Nonetheless, this evokes another reality: at the upholsterer’s, X is the name of a small stool that has the letter’s shape (DEAF and TL).

⁴⁰ Huon: “La maniere dirai de l’X./Ceste letre est en mains bons lieus” (= I’ll speak to you about the X; this letter always appears in good places, ll. 337-8).

⁴¹ In most of the devotional medieval French ABCs, X refers to Christ.

slightly updated to secular taste.⁴² But why would X then be a “lettre venimeuse” (= poisonous letter, l. 42) in the *Alphabet*? Probably because the X = *ieus* = “eyes” – again I see no other possible reading, and it seems to me that the poem’s dependence on its model is particularly obvious here – have been indeed consecrated by poetry as the fatal weapon of the “filles à”, that is to say “the girls towards” those “jeunes enfants” (= young children) who are their suitors and lovers.

The G-spot

The *con* (= cunt) gets the final word. The ballad devotes no less than two stanzas to the Tironian abbreviation for *con* and *com*, graphically corresponding to a 9. It serves as a conclusion and goes hand in hand with a self-reflexive dimension. In fact, like the G in the refrain or the G in line 15, the 9 is explicitly designated as a “lectre” (= letter); moreover, the narrator specifies that it takes place “en mon livre” (= in my book, l. 26). It may well be that the deictic here refers, *in absentia*, to the teaching manual used by the bad cleric. However, it seems much more likely that it alludes, *in praesentia*, to the poem which is his manifesto and which he and we hold in our hands. In this sense, “mon livre” (= my book) designates both the ABC recited by the *nonsavant* and the material volume in which it is placed. By all means, choosing the *con*, hence the “cunt”, to reflect on writing is obviously not trivial. On the one hand, it is a question of revealing a knowledge – or a non-knowledge – that has been kept hidden: the letter that until then was called 9 “par soy”, that is to say “in secret, in a hidden way” (l. 37 and l. 43), is now within everyone’s reach (l. 38 “Mais chascun s’en veult entremectre” = everyone wants to get involved, and l. 43, “[...] a tous en apper” = in plain sight). It is as if, by commenting the 9 in his ABC, the school cleric extracted it from a jewellery box intended for the happy few, in order to offer it to all, in a movement similar to Gautier de Coinci translating the *Miracles* of the Virgin from Latin into French to “désensevelir” (= unsevel), them, as one exhumes a treasure from the earth.⁴³ As incongruous as it may seem, the telescoping is revealing here: singing about the *con* that is never spoken of allows the anti-poet to perfect his satire and to legitimize its writing in front of everyone. It is just the same as the fact of exhuming the inaccessible Latin *Miracles* by translating them authorizes the poet of the Virgin to praise her and spread her worship.

The rising of the 9, however, doesn’t happen anyhow, since it is a matter of coupling it to the “v.i.t.” (= c.o.c.k.). Here, we find again the injunctions to couple letters, such as O and B in the *Ballade* (ll. 17-18), C and B or V and V in the *Alphabet* (ll. 17-18 and l. 39). But the coupling produces now a much more rascal syllepsis: *dessembler* (= split) and *coupler* (= couple), used here to designate the association of letters, are also suitable, of course, to evoke the carnal union. The 9 is to be associated with the *v.i.t.*, *i.e.* with the opposite sex, by means of a pun that Tabourot (as you might have guessed!) did not forget to celebrate in his chapter on rebus.⁴⁴ The treatment of the three letters is innovative in the *Ballade*, since unlike the other letters, they are not submitted to a homophonic diversion and they are unequivocal.⁴⁵ In order to respect the metre, they require spelling. In this sense, *v.i.t.* joins 9 in the same euphemistic practice, the discretion of the abbreviated sign being equal to that of spelling. For proof, let’s mention the following proverb found by Elena Llamas Pombo: “Ce que gaigne clerc o penne / Tout emporte c.o.n.” (= What a clerk earns with his pen / Everything takes away c.o.n.).⁴⁶ The word *con* is concealed, but its poetic consistency is fully admitted. As for the *v.i.t.* of our ballad, the rhyme and the counting of syllables in this proverb are only accomplished if the letters of the word are spelled out, in order to feel its reflexive power.

⁴² *Isaiab*, 6: 10.

⁴³ Gautier de Coinci, *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*, ed. V. Frederic Koenig (Genève: Droz, 1955), I vol. I Pr 1, ll. 32-7.

⁴⁴ See, among others, Tabourot, *Bigarrures*, 30-31.

⁴⁵ Cf. Cornilliat, “Or ne mens”, 400.

⁴⁶ *Recueil de 798 proverbes avec commentaires juridiques empruntés au droit canon et civil*, ms. *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Reg. lat. 1429, f. 25^r (14th century), and Joseph Morawski, *Proverbes français antérieurs au XV^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1925) no. 327, 121, quoted by Llamas Pombo, “*Gratiam varietatis*”.

All in all, the message hardly changes from the proverb to the last two stanzas of the *Ballade*. In both cases, it is a question of playing with the most gratuitous misogynistic clichés, or the most “rewarding” ones in this case, since *con* leads to squandering. On this point, our poem even goes further, when it states that “qui le sert du cueur y pert / Sens, temps, corps, bien, ame et avoir” (= who serves the *con* with heart loses / Sense, time, body, good, soul and possessions, ll. 45-46). In other words, if we try too hard to bind the 9 to the *v.i.t.*, we run the risk of losing our ABC (= *sens* = sense), our R (= *temps* = time), our O and Q (= *corps* = body) and our S (= *bien* = good), our M (= *ame* = soul) and our G (= *possessions* = having). It is more than enough to lose one’s French, and to see the entire poem fall apart. All weighed up, then, the bad cleric renounces the flesh in favor of more tangible realities: “Je doncques concluz que, de voir, / Ung mot pour tous qu’en l’A.B.C. / N’a bonne lecture sinon G” (= I therefore conclude that, in reality, / A word for all, in the A.B.C. / There’s is no such good letter as G, ll. 47-49).

What about the *Alphabet*? Nothing is said about the *con*, as it seems, since the last stanza of the poem is dedicated to the Z, after the poet forbids “la lettre du Q” (= the letter of the arse) to young men fascinated by the X (= eyes) of the girls, on pain of losing their reputation (ll. 45-47). The Z, which is called “faulx lettre detestable” (= detestable faulx letter, l. 50), echoes the X, “lettre venimeuse” (= poisonous letter) by means of a gradation: Z is elevated to the rank of supreme abomination, given its form (“Advisez comment elle est faicte” = See how it is made, l. 51) and especially its power of contamination: “Tout ainsi faict, par cas notable, / Devenir ceulx qui en font feste” (= It is well known that it makes all those who celebrate it so, ll. 52-53). It is certainly understandable that the graphical shape of the Z could give rise to such a comment, which echoes what the *Ballade* says about the S. However, it seems hard to justify such a virulent condemnation. In fact, the Z is almost ignored by the French poetical ABCs; considered as a “Greek” letter, it poses obvious difficulties for the authors and/or the copists. The biblical surnames chosen by the poets, such as “Zacharie” in Guillaume de Digulleville’s, “Zoroas” in the *ABC Plantefolie* or “Zabulon” in the *ABC a femmes*, are rarely legitimized by the poetical context. The hesitation of *Plantefolie*’s copists in front of “Zoroas”, no doubt Zoroaster, sometimes replaced by “Zacharie” (ms. B) and sometimes by “Zorobabel” (ms. C), suggests that the alphabetical order, much more than the identity of the character in question, motivates the choice. As for “Zebulon” in the *ABC a femmes*, the poet’s rhetorical exclamation – “C’est un propre noun!” (= It is a proper name!) doesn’t say much except that he is powerless to explain it any further. Others, such as Huon de Cambrai and Ferrant, confess half-wordly their inability to find a suitable term. The Z “A painnes par moi descrite” (= which I have painstakingly described) of the *ABC par ekivoche* is curiously exemplified by the word *kyrieleison*, while Ferrant appears like a master of the ellipse (“Z vueil encor dire, s’iert mes abecés fais” = I still want to describe the Z and then my ABC will be done).⁴⁷ If, therefore, the Z doesn’t exactly smell like a saint among the letrist poets because of the difficulties it causes them, it does not deserve either the unquestionable judgment pronounced by the *Alphabet du temps présent*. This is why we must give priority to the lesson preserved by the majority of the old editions of the poem, which have 9 instead of Z, sometimes abbreviated, sometimes in full letters. Everything then becomes clearer, with the help of a new syllepsis: the *Alphabet* rejects the 9, on the grounds that those who celebrate it run the risk of becoming like it, that is to say “con” (= dumb) in the modern sense of “stupid, idiot, imbecile”, already attested to in Middle French.⁴⁸ In other words, by exhorting his readers to turn away from the flesh for the sake of wealth, to push away the *nous* (= us) in order to be satisfied with the *je* (= I), the writer borrows from a poetic vein which at the same period excels at saying goodbye, that of the “Congés”, or 9G. From the poisonous X to the detestable 9, through the forbidden Q, the poem joins the *senefiance*

⁴⁷ Respectively, and in the order in which they are mentioned, the references are: Guillaume de Digulleville, *Le Livre du pèlerin*, l. 13315; *ABC Plantefolie*, ll. 193, 199-200; *ABC a femmes*, l. 265; Huon, *ABC par ekivoche*, l. 383-94, in particular 385 et 393; and Ferrant, *ABC Nostre Dame*, l. 88.

⁴⁸ DMF and FEW.

of its model: “Mais concluez qu’en A.B.C. / N’a bonne lettre sinon G” (= Please conclude that in the ABC there is no such good letter as G, ll. 55-56).

It is time for us also to conclude. At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the good letters willing to pray Our Lady, sing virtue and lead to salvation are challenged by the bushy, rebellious letters, turned upside down by the mischievous poets of the *Ballade de l’ABC* and the *Alphabet du temps présent*. A counter-culture was born, which heckled the alphabet to upset its symbolic order and played on equivocations to resemanticize the letters. On both sides of the “Gutenberg revolution”, the two poems are part of the same tendency to relativize the incantatory, and therefore transcendental, powers of language. If they vary in terms of material support, the source and its rewriting deal with the same questions, with the same ends. Moreover, by denouncing the conventions and inverting the codes of the ABC vogue, they both show that they belong in it. In short, they remind of the duplicity of the letters which, devoted to praying the “*con*-fortable” Virgin, are no less devoted to sniffing the *con* of less honourable ladies. It is clear, therefore, that we are dealing with one and the same tradition, which thinks as much of its seriousness and piety as of its pleasure in reasserting its foundations through the ABC. And it must be admitted that, apart from the topical irony of preferring wealth to knowledge, our poems ultimately reaffirm the conventional morality. By parodying and mocking the alphabet, they recognize and even sanctify its omnipotence. Nevertheless, what irreducibly remains is the feast of words, the hullabaloo of the alphabet, the butt-over-head of the letters. The obscenity of poetry, in short.⁴⁹

Bibliography

- Alexandre-Bidon, Danièle. “L’arbre à alphabet”. In *L’Arbre. Histoire naturelle et symbolique de l’arbre*, edited by Michel Pastoureau, 127-43. Paris: Le Léopard d’or, 1992.
- Alexandre-Bidon, Danièle. “La lettre volée, Apprendre à lire à l’enfant au Moyen Âge.” *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 44, no. 4 (1989): 953-992.
- Berenguer d’Anoia, *Mirall de trobar*, edited by Jaume Vidal i Alcover, 112-4. Palma: Publicacions de l’Abada de Montserrat, 1984.
- Bouteiller, Ernest de. *La Guerre de Metz en 1324, poème du XIV^e siècle*. Paris: Didot, 1875.
- Cappelli, Adriano. *Dizionario di abbreviature latine ed italiane usate nelle carte e codici specialmente nel medio-evo*. Milano: U. Hoepli, 1899.
- Cerquiglini-Toulet, Jacqueline. “L’alphabet des poètes. Rêverie des poètes médiévaux sur la lettre.” In *Belles Lettres. Les figures de l’écrit au Moyen Âge/Figurationen des Schreibens im Mittelalter*, edited by Marion Uhlig and Martin Rohde, with Luca Barbieri and Pauline Quarroz, 179-92. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2019.
- Champion, Pierre, Ed. “Pièces joyeuses du XV^e siècle”. *Revue de philologie française et de littérature* 21 (1907): 161-96.
- Collet, Olivier, and Marion Uhlig Eds. *ABC Plantefolie*. To be published.
- Collet, Olivier, Yan Greub, David Moos, Thibaut Radomme, and Marion Uhlig. “Les poèmes abécédaires en français (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)”, edited by Thibaut Radomme. *French Studies*. To be published.
- Cornilliat, François. “Or ne mens”. *Couleurs de l’éloge et du blame chez les “Grands Rhétoriciens”*. Paris: Champion, 1994.
- Ferrant. *ABC Nostre Dame*, edited by Olivier Collet and Marion Uhlig. To be published.
- Gautier de Coinci. *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*, edited by V. Frederic Koenig. Genève: Droz, 1955-1970, 4 vol.
- Greer Fein, Susanna, Ed. *ABC a femmes*. In *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, vol. II. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014:

⁴⁹ Thibaut Radomme knows what this article owes him. I thank him warmly.

- Gros, Gérard. *Le Poète marial et l'art graphique. Étude sur les jeux de lettres dans les poèmes pieux du Moyen Âge*. Orléans: Paradigme, 1993.
- Guillaume Alexis. *ABC des doubles*. In *Œuvres poétiques*, edited by Arthur Piaget and Émile Picot, I, 1-54. Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1896-1908.
- Guillaume de Deguileville. *Le Livre du pèlerin de vie humaine (1355)*, edited by Graham Robert Edwards and Philippe Maupeu. Paris: Librairie générale française, 2015.
<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/fein-harley2253-volume-2-article-8>.
- Huon le Roi de Cambrai. *Œuvres, I: ABC, Ave Maria, La descriptions des relegions* [1913], edited by Arthur Långfors. Paris: Champion, 1925².
- Jean Molinet. *Dictier de Franchois et Gantois*. In *Les Faictz et Dictz*, edited by Noël Dupire, 205-8. Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1936.
- Jeanroy, Alfred. "Corrections aux 'Pièces joyeuses du XV^e siècle'". *Revue de philologie française et de littérature* 22 (1908): 68-69.
- Kay, Sarah. "As in Heart, so in Mouth': Translating the Scandal of Wolfish Desire from Fables to Peire Vidal". *French Studies* 69, no.1 (2015), 1-13.
- Klapisch-Zuber, Christiane. "Le chiavi fiorentine di Barbablù: l'apprendimento della lettura a Firenze nel XV secolo". *Quaderni Storici* 57 (1984), 765-92.
- Långfors Arthur. "Notice du manuscrit français 24436 de la Bibliothèque nationale". *Romania* 41 (1912): 206-46.
- Llamas Pombo, Elena. "Gratiam varietatis. Paramètres de variation stylistique de la lettre au Moyen Âge". In *Belles Lettres. Les figures de l'écrit au Moyen Âge/Figurationen des Schreibens im Mittelalter*, edited by Marion Uhlig and Martin Rohde, with Luca Barbieri and Pauline Quarroz, 193-214. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2019.
- Margolin, Jean-Claude, and Jean Céard, *Rébus de la Renaissance : des images qui parlent*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986, 2 vol.
- Marot, Clément. *Œuvres*, edited by Georges Guiffrey. Vol. II. Paris: Librairie de l'art français, 1875.
- Marot, Clément. *Œuvres*. Paris: P. Rosset, 1534.
- Morawski, Joseph. *Proverbes français antérieurs au XV^e siècle*. Paris: Champion, 1925.
- Novati, Francesco. "Le serie alfabetiche proverbiali et gli alfabeti disposti nella letteratura italiana de' primi tre secoli". *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 15, no. 1 (1890): 337-401.
- Recueil de 798 proverbes avec commentaires juridiques empruntés au droit canon et civil*. Ms. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1429 (XIV^e s.).
- Suchier, Walther. "Altfranzösische Traumbücher". *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 67, no. 2 (1956/1957), 129-67.
- Tabourot, Etienne. *Les Bigarrures du Seigneur des Accords (Premier Livre)*. Fac-sim. of the 1538 ed., notes by Francis Goyet. Genève: Droz, 1986), 2 vol.
- Tory, Geoffroy. *Champ fleury*. Paris: Olivier Mallard, 1535 ou 1536.
- Zumthor, Paul. *Langue, texte, énigme*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.

« La ballade de l'A.B.C. », in Pierre Champion, <i>Pièces joyeuses, Revue de philologie française et de littérature</i> 21 (1907): 161-96.		« L'alphabet du temps présent », in Clément Marot, <i>Œuvres</i> , éd. Georges Guiffrey [Paris : Librairie de l'art français, 1875], II, 499-502.	
Je suis devenu clerc d'escolle ;	1	Qui veult apprendre l'alphabet	1
Desja scay la croix depardieu,		Du temps present vienne à l'escolle	
Ou j'ay volenté saige et folle :		De monsieur maistre Jehan Favet,	
Frequenter ne vueil aultre lieu.		Qui luy en baillera la colle :	
Je scay ja ung si tres beau jeu,	5	C'est celluy qui fort bien recolle,	5
Car en trestout mon a.b.c.		En disant qu'en tout l'A.B.C.	
N'a bonne lectre sinon .g.		N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	
Quant mon maistre dit .a.a.a.		Quant le maistre dit : A.A.A.,	
Je cuidois qu'il fust esbahy ;		Le disciple se prend à rire	

E.f.g.h.i et k M'ont ung peu le cueur resjouy : Et quant j'euz tout veu et ouy Je treuve qu'en mon a.b.c. N'a bonne lectre sinon .g.	10	Des oysons qui crient K.K. : Car c'est le parler, pour vous dire, De chiabrena. Au pis le pire, Je treuve qu'en tout l'A.B.C. N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	10
D. est une mauvaïse lectre Et a maint clerç a fait injure ; B. vault mieulx, mais il se doit mectre Après .o. par ordre et mesure. Des lectres congnois la nature Mais en trestout mon a.b.c. N'a bonne lectre sinon .g.	15	D. est une mauvaïse lettre, Qui fait emprunter à usure. B. vault beaucoup mieulx, selon l'estre, Quant après C., prend sa mesure. Toutesfoys, quant bien je mesure En trestout de mon A.B.C., N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	15
L. de chappon gras est bonne N. de riviere ou maslart Et .m. de just personne ; O. s'esmerveille tost ou tard ; Par .q. vente tonne et espart. Mais au fort de mon a.b.c. N'a bonne lectre sinon .g.	20	H. est une lettre qui tranche : N. bien grasse est de saison : L. de chappon sur la tranche Faict bon prendre en bonne maison : M., sans péché, c'est raison Qu'elle die qu'en l'A.B.C. N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	25
R. tout le monde souvent Par erreur et par congnoissance ; X. a tel qui ne veoit neant Et .s. quiert en desplaisance ; L'un recule l'autre s'avance Non pourtant en mon a.b.c. N'a bonne lectre sinon .g.	25	Les Q.Q. troussez gros & espaiz Ont fort au jourd'huy le credit, Qui guerre font & poulsent petz Et ont O. pres le trou mauldit. P. pour bien faire on leur a dit : Et leur maintient qu'en l'A.B.C. N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	30
En mon livre y a une lectre Qui .9. par soy est appellee ; Mais chascun s'en veult entremectre Qu'elle soit point dessemblee, Ainsi soit a .v.i.t. couplee. Et par tout en mon a.b.c. N'a bonne lectre sinon .g.	30	R. maint ung, au temps present, Pour un peu sçavoir trop cuide : S. heresie qui a présent Nous faict de VV. l'oultre cuide ? Voilà le point est tout vuyde Que certes en mon A.B.C. N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	35
.9. par soy, a tous en apper, Fait a ses serviteurs sçavoir Que qui le sert du cueur y pert Sens, temps, corps, biens, ame et avoir. Je doncques concluz que, de voir, Ung mot pour tous qu'en l'a.b.c. N'a bonne lectre sinon .g.	35	X. est la lettre venimeuse De filles a jeunes enfants : Mais toutesfoys, quoi qu'on y muse, La lettre du Q. leur deffens, Ou cherront d'estre triumphans, Disans puis qu'en tout l'A.B.C. N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	40
	40	Z. faulse lettre detestable, Advisez comment elle est faicte : Tout ainsi faict, par cas notable, Devenir ceulx qui en font feste. N'y mectez plus votre entrefaicte, Mais concluez qu'en A.B.C. N'a bonne lettre sinon G.	50
	45		55