

Performing *imitatio*: Bruscombille's prologues and Cesare Rao's *Lettres facetteuses* (1584)

Abstract:

The comic actor known as Bruscombille (*fl.* 1608-34), who performed and published theatrical prologues in early seventeenth-century France, drew on a range of sources for his best-selling works. In the dedication to one of his major collections he includes a lengthy justification of *imitatio*. Appropriately enough, Bruscombille has in fact adapted the passage on imitation from *L'argute et facete lettere* (1562) of Cesare Rao (1532-88?), which he knew through a French translation by Gabriel Chappuys (1546?-1613), the *Lettres facetteuses* (1584). We have identified these letters as Bruscombille's most prominent source, yet, as detailed discussion of prologues on folly and pedantry reveals, the comedian's creativity is enhanced by his *imitatio*. This article is therefore a case-study that sheds light on the status of this rhetorical practice in the late Renaissance as well as on broader issues of plagiarism and adaptation.

Keywords:

imitation; plagiarism; rhetoric; humour; theatre; pedantry; folly; translation; *facetiae*; printing; mock encomium; insults

Performing *imitatio*: Bruscombille's prologues and Cesare Rao's *Lettres facétieuses* (1584)*

By way of preface to his third major collection of theatrical prologues, *Les nouvelles et plaisantes Imaginations* (1613), Bruscombille (*fl.* 1608-34) addresses a letter to an illustrious member of his audience, Henri II de Bourbon-Condé (1586-1646).¹ As well as referring to the prince's support for the theatre, the actor-author reveals how self-aware and indeed defensive, in this letter at least, he was about his use of imitation. He acknowledges critics' condemnation of *imitatio* as a form of theft: 'Je sçay bien que les Aristarques de ce temps y donneront chacun un coup de bec [...] disans [...] il a derobé icy il a imité là'.² Nevertheless, he defends the practice by drawing, in rapid succession, on commonplace metaphors, all of which convey the transformation of material from others into something of one's own:

Les autoritez se peuvent prendre ès lieux où elles se rencontrent à propos [...] comme l'on se sert de diverses fleurs, pour rendre un bouquet plus parfait, mieux orné & accompli. Les auteurs modernes font comme celuy lequel arrivant le dernier au festin, espluche ce qui a jà passé par la main des autres : & aujourd'huy celuy est tenu pour le plus subtil & entendu qui sçait esplucher de bonne grace, c'est-à-dire agencer &

* We would like to acknowledge insights derived from conversations with Neil Kenny and Luke O'Sullivan in the writing of this article.

¹ 'A tres-haut, tres-excellent, tres-vertueux & tres-magnanime Prince Henry de Bourbon [...]', in Bruscombille, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Hugh Roberts and Annette Tomarken (Paris: Champion, 2012) (henceforth abbreviated to *OC*), pp. 380-81. The *Imaginations* follow the *Prologues* (1610) and the *Fantaisies* (1612), which contains all 33 pieces contained in the *Prologues* in addition to 24 new ones; for further details, see the bibliography of Bruscombille's works, *OC*, pp. 83-117. Henri II de Bourbon-Condé proved not to be an ideal choice of dedicatee, as he was soon to be temporarily disgraced in a failed rebellion against the regency of Marie de Medici. Bruscombille was baptized Jean Gracieux and is also known as the Sieur Des Lauriers (see Alan Howe, 'Bruscombille, qui était-il?', *XVII^e Siècle*, 153 (1986-87), 390-96). For an introduction to Bruscombille more generally, see Michel Jeanneret, *J'aime ta joie parce qu'elle est folle: écrivains en fête (XVI^e-XVII^e siècles)* (Geneva: Droz, 2018), pp. 132-34; for other critical work on him, see references in footnotes below. No book-length study has been devoted to Bruscombille to date, but Flavie Kerautret is at a late stage of a doctoral thesis on the comedian under the supervision of Professor Guillaume Peureux at the Université Paris Nanterre.

² *OC*, p. 380; for a classic study of Renaissance *imitatio*, see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 1979), part 1, chapter 2. The Greek grammarian Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 220-c. 143 BC) became a byword for a harsh critic.

appropriier à son sujet les choses dites & practiquées par un autre. Tels correcteurs à la douzaine ressemblent à la mousche guespe nonchalante, qui ne fait point de miel, & neantmoins mange celuy que les industrieuses abeilles ont amassé.³

Such reflections at the threshold of a collection of prologues Bruscombille had not previously printed indicate a significant level of cultural and rhetorical awareness on the part of the farce-player and his readership, who would have recognized such commonplaces. Indeed, practically every printed page of the prologues is replete with erudite allusions as well as Latin quotations and *facetiae*. Such references provide an excellent indication of the level of education of the performer and his audience and/or readership, which would mostly have been made up of lawyers or students of law and similarly qualified people, in other words an educated and doubtless demanding public.⁴

Above all, displaying a certain chutzpah, Bruscombille has in fact imitated these reflections on imitation from Cesare Rao's (1532-88?) *L'argute et facete lettere* (1562), which he knew through a French translation by Gabriel Chappuys (1546?-1613), the *Lettres faceteuses et subtiles* (1584).⁵ Clearly, this piece of imitation is performative, in the sense that

³ *OC*, pp. 380-81; on such metaphors in French Renaissance writing, see especially Michel Jeanneret, *Des mets et des mots: banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance* (Paris: Corti, 1987), pp. 253-58.

⁴ Cf. Michel Jeanneret's view of the prologues: 'c'est l'étalage d'érudition qui frappe', *J'aime ta joie*, p. 132. On Bruscombille's readership, see Henri-Jean Martin, *Livres, pouvoirs et société à Paris au XVII^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), p. 963 and *OC*, p. 21; Martin similarly establishes the proximity of Bruscombille's Parisian printers to the law courts and university: Jean Millot, the printer of the *Prologues* (1609/10) and the *Fantaisies* (1612), had a shop at the Palais de Justice and a stall near the Pont-Neuf where the actor Tabarin performed; similarly, François Huby, who printed Bruscombille's *Imaginations* (1613), was 'Maistre Imprimeur & Marchand Libraire en l'Université de Paris', *OC*, p. 519.

⁵ *Lettres faceteuses et subtiles de Cesar Rao [...] Non moins plaisantes & recreatives, que morales, pour tous esprits genereux*, trans. by Gabriel Chappuys (Lyon: Jean Stratius, 1584), pp. 279-82 ('A l'excellent Physicien le Seigneur Jean Antoine Tuffe d'Alexan'). On Chappuys's translation, see Jean-Marc Dechaud, *Bibliographie critique des ouvrages et traductions de Gabriel Chappuys* (Geneva: Droz, 2014), pp. 253-55. Two Lyon printers, Jean Stratius and Antoine Tardif, shared the initial *privilège* and the translation had a second edition in another important centre of printing, Rouen, where it came off the presses of Claude Le Villain in 1609 and was reissued in 1610 (see Dechaud, p. 255). Bruscombille may have consulted this later edition, there do not appear to be major differences between them as far as their contents are concerned. On Rao and his work, see Maria Cristina Figorilli, 'L'argute et facete lettere di Cesare Rao: paradossi e plagi (tra Doni, Lando, Agrippa e Pedro Mexía)', *Lettere Italiane*, 56 (2004), 410-41, Paul F. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World (1530-1560): Anton Francesco Doni, Nicolò Franco and Ortensio Lando* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 202-04, and Pietro Giulio Riga, 'Rao, Cesare', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 86 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana,

it does what it says, thereby hiding the unacknowledged borrowing in the open.⁶ Bruscombille in fact follows Rao's advice, selecting the choicest morsels of the letter and adjusting them to his purposes. Indeed, Cotgrave renders one of Bruscombille's synonyms for *imitatio*, 'agencer', as 'fitly disposed, finely placed, neatly fitted'.⁷ His letter thus perfectly illustrates the very principle that is its theme. Take also, for example, the equivalent to the banquet metaphor as it appears in the *Lettres facétieuses*:

Les auteurs modernes sont comme celuy lequell estant arrivé au banquet, y arrive quand les autres ont fait : il espluche & prend des restes un morceau d'une chose & un morceau de l'autre. Et aujourd'huy celuy est appellé le meilleur compositeur, lequell sçait le mieux esplucher, c'est à dire qui fait le mieux tomber à son propos les choses dites par autruy.⁸

Clearly, in addition to altering Rao's letter in terms of *inventio*, by selecting key passages, Bruscombille also adapts it at a level of *dispositio*. Hence while the former refers rather apologetically to a modern 'compositeur', for the latter imitation is an opportunity to demonstrate rhetorical ingenuity (being 'subtil & entendu') and hence authorship and, beyond that, theatrical practice, as suggested by the actor's addition that the things imitated are not only 'dites' but 'practiquées'. There is no known testimony to indicate how closely the printed versions corresponded to Bruscombille's performance of prologues designed to capture the attention of audiences at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Paris and beyond. Yet traces of their spoken

2016), pp. 487-489. On Rao himself, see Donato Verardi, 'Rao, Cesare' (2015), *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by Mario Sgarbi (Springer, Cham), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4_103-1 [accessed 15 August 2019].

⁶ Naturally, as Grendler and Figorilli in particular point out, Rao himself closely imitates various sources, including Doni. Since Bruscombille adapts Rao, rather than investigate the works on which Rao draws, it lies beyond the scope of this article to trace Rao's own sources.

⁷ Randle Cotgrave, *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Islip, 1611).

⁸ *Lettres facétieuses*, p. 281.

origin, from addressing and insulting the audience to slips of the tongue, are found on practically every page of Bruscabille's works. Such revealing features extend, as we shall show, to the comedian's adaptation of non-dramatic source material to make it suitable for performance, or to give the impression of theatrical dynamism, or both.⁹ In short, Bruscabille's adaptations of Rao's letters are worthy of sustained analysis precisely because they constitute this most creative kind of *imitatio*, not slavish copying or plagiarism. What insights does his *imitatio* give into his creative process? How does it reflect back on his practice as a performer and author? And what light does imitation shed on the status of the practice more widely in late Renaissance French writing, especially as it relates to the trade in books of *facetiae*? More broadly, what does this case study contribute to our understanding of the perpetually fraught question of how to differentiate between plagiarism and innovative imitation?

To address these and related questions, we shall indicate, first, the extent of Bruscabille's imitations of Rao, not least by comparing them to the actor's other borrowings. We shall then briefly set the prologues in the context of other late Renaissance French comic works in which *imitatio* is a topic of discussion, including the *Lettres facetieuses* themselves. We shall therefore also address the issue of why a professional translator like Chappuys was drawn to the *Lettres facetieuses*, which impinges on why they were so useful to Bruscabille. The second part will be a close reading of how Bruscabille reworks Chappuys's translation of Rao, in prologues on folly and pedantry in which self-reflexivity about his practice as a comic imitator, writer and performer allows him to, as he puts it, 'esplucher de bonne grace'.

1. *Imitatio* in Rao, Bruscabille and contemporary comic works

⁹ Cf. Robert Henke's comment on Domenico Bruni (Fulvio)'s prologues: 'literary embellishment by no means rules out stage derivation', *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 45.

While editing Bruscombille's works, we uncovered a range of texts he imitated but also noted that other sources were bound to be found.¹⁰ We had not yet identified Chappuys's translation of Rao, but it is in fact the most prominent source of the prologues uncovered thus far: 9 out of the 115 printed speeches contain borrowings from the *Lettres facétieuses*; the borrowings vary from a single phrase to more substantial passages. In fact, Bruscombille borrows from at least 17 of the 61 letters and other material in Rao: in other words, he often splices together multiple sections of Rao to arrive at different sections of one or more prologues.¹¹ Such *inventio* is characteristic of all his borrowings, his selection of material is considerably more complex when Bruscombille is dealing with comic as opposed to serious works.¹²

One of the few critics to have paid attention to Bruscombille's manipulation of sources, Michel Simonin, noted that the actor borrowed 'De l'excellence de l'homme', a prologue first published in the *Imaginations* (1613), from Pierre Boiastuau's *Bref discours de l'excellence et dignité de l'homme* (1558); he concludes that, despite some cuts and additions of brief addresses to an audience, Bruscombille follows his model 'jusqu'au plagiat' and, therefore, unwary readers should not assume that the 'farceur' is as steeped in humanist learning as he may appear to be.¹³ Although understandable, such caveats betray a critical double standard, since

¹⁰ *OC*, p. 63; Jean-Philippe Beaulieu has also made another such discovery, revealing that the 'Discours Facecieux', the final prologue of the *Fantaisies* (1612), *OC*, pp. 375-77, derives from the *Discours nouveau fait par Maître Guillaume à son retour de l'autre monde* (1609), 'Billevesées, boniments et discours pamphlétaire chez Maître Guillaume', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 119 (2019), 23-34 (pp. 28-29). Another French translation of an Italian source, *La contre-lesine, Ou plustost discours, constitutions et louanges de la liberalité, remplis de Moralité, de doctrine, & beaux traicts admirables [...]* (Paris: Abraham Saugrain, 1604), was an important source for Bruscombille's 'Prologue de Rien' and 'Prologue contre l'Avarice', *OC*, pp. 177-79 and 272-75.

¹¹ These figures are only indicative because sometimes Rao himself repeats material from one letter in another in a process Figorilli calls internal recycling, '*L'argute et facete lettere di Cesare Rao*', p. 420.

¹² *OC*, pp. 61-63. For another example of how Bruscombille adapts of Rao/Chappuys, see his transformation of 'Au sieur Martin de la vallee, *Lepidum caput*', an exercise in *vituperatio*, into a Priapic mock encomium, 'A la louange du seigneur Foüilletrou' in the *Imaginations* (*Lettres facétieuses*, pp. 64-71 and *OC*, pp. 450-51), Hugh Roberts, 'Anatomisant anatomicollicolliconiquement: blasons et contreblasons dans les prologues de Bruscombille', *Anatomie d'une anatomie: Nouvelles recherches sur les blasons anatomiques du corps féminin*, ed. by Julien Gœury and Thomas Hunkeler (Geneva: Droz, 2018), pp. 621-38 (pp. 632-33).

¹³ Michel Simonin, 'Boaistuau et Bruscombille: note sur le texte des *Imaginations*', *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la Renaissance*, 9 (1979), 14-19 (p. 17); see also *OC*, pp. 61-62.

Boiastuau's *Bref discours* is itself full of borrowings from various sources.¹⁴ There are several other cases, especially in overtly serious prologues, where Bruscombille draws heavily on the 'pastissages de lieux communs' mocked by Montaigne.¹⁵ The actor was clearly well versed in commonplace material on general moral issues, probably because it served an initial theatrical function of introducing tragedies or tragi-comedies. It also gives another dimension of potential interest for his readers, for whom Bruscombille's collections contained the stuff of contemporary miscellanies, albeit with better jokes, all of which they could in turn redeploy in different contexts, much like the *Lettres facetieuses* themselves. Bruscombille, as Simonin himself puts it, has '[compilé] les compilateurs de l'époque précédente'.¹⁶ In other words, he recycles commonplace material in a way that is typical of the writing practices of his day, including of Rao himself. Simonin's accusation of plagiarism amounts to an anachronistic value judgement. We maintain instead that the kind of critical elitism that allows Montaigne, Shakespeare and other canonical authors to have their 'sources', while the likes of Rao and Bruscombille are deemed guilty of plagiarism, is best avoided or at least questioned.¹⁷

Bruscombille's *imitatio*, as opposed to plagiarism, is especially apparent in his adaptations of comic or paradoxical material, in a way that is, we shall argue, uniquely revealing of his creative process as a comedian. For instance, half of all the prologues are mock encomia on more or less familiar topics for this widespread genre.¹⁸ In the *Fantaisies*, he notably draws

¹⁴ *Bref discours de l'excellence et dignité de l'homme [1558]*, ed. by Michel Simonin (Geneva: Droz, 1982); see the footnotes to 'De l'excellence de l'homme', *OC*, pp. 441-45.

¹⁵ *Essais*, ed. by Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: PUF, 1965), III, 12, 1056c; to take other examples from the *Imaginations*, Bruscombille borrows material for two prologues from Charron's *De la sagesse* (1601) and another, 'De la constance', from a much more obscure work, *L'Apologie de la constance, ou fleau des inconstans* (1599); see *OC*, p. 62.

¹⁶ Simonin, 'Boiastuau et Bruscombille', p. 16.

¹⁷ For another example of this critical tendency to accuse minor Renaissance authors of plagiarism, see Figorilli, 'L'argute et facete lettere di Cesare Rao: paradossi e plagi'; for canonical authors see, for example, Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l'évolution des 'Essais' de Montaigne*, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1908); *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. by Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967-75).

¹⁸ See *OC*, pp. 46-55. On mock encomia generally, see, among others, Patrick Dandrey, *L'Éloge paradoxal de Gorgias à Molière* (Paris: PUF, 1997) and Annette Tomarken, *The Smile of Truth: The French Satirical Eulogy and Its Antecedents* (Princeton University Press, 1990). On Bruscombille's use of the genre, see Volker Kapp, 'Éloge paradoxal et blâme burlesque dans les prologues de Bruscombille: la culture oratoire d'un farceur français au XVII^e siècle', *Studi di letteratura francese*, 22 (1997), 63-86, and Annette Tomarken, "'Un beau petit

without acknowledgement on Louis de Mayerne-Turquet's translation of Agrippa, *Déclamation sur l'incertitude, vanité, & abus des sciences* (1582), for four mock encomia, of ignorance, lying, truth, and donkeys respectively, but in each instance he adapts the original, often to omit potentially dangerous religious references.¹⁹ Similarly, Charles Estienne's adaptation of Ortensio Lando, *Paradoxes* (1553), is an important source for two other satirical eulogies, 'Prologue de la laideur & deformité de visage' and 'De l'ivrognerie'.²⁰ Finally, he draws on the *Contes et discours d'Eutrapel* (1585) by Noël Du Fail (1520?-91), for two speeches, including a 'Prologue sur un autre plaidoyé', which contains a remarkable apology for obscene or unorthodox material and terminology adapted from one of Du Fail's tales, allowing him to claim that, if censored, works would be 'un banquet de diables où il n'y a point de sel'.²¹

Yet Bruscombille's discussion of *imitatio* in his letter to Condé also suggests that the tide is turning against it, since he betrays an anxiety that imitation equates to theft. This was not new: for example, Guillaume Bouchet (1513?-94), in his preface to the first book of his vast *Sérées* (first edition, 1584), also recognizes potential 'censeurs' who would accuse him of borrowing too heavily. Bouchet responds, with perhaps unwitting irony, 'si j'ay desrobé quelque chose, quel interest y ont-ils? [...] Et encore qu'il soit d'un autre, puisqu'il est veritable il est mien, disoit Seneque'.²² Despite superficial similarities, Bouchet concedes a point that Bruscombille does not; the former is disarmingly willing to present himself as a mere borrower

encomion": Bruscombille and the Satirical Eulogy on Stage', *Renaissance Reflections: Essays in Memory of C. A. Mayer*, ed. by Pauline M. Smith and Trevor Peach (Paris: Champion, 2002), pp. 247-67.

¹⁹ *OC*, p. 63.

²⁰ *OC*, pp. 173-76 and 390-95; cf. 'Pour la laideur de visage' et 'Pour les biberons', *Paradoxes*, ed. by Trevor Peach (Geneva: Droz, 1998), pp. 78-82 et 117-125.

²¹ *OC*, pp. 200-01; the tale in question is 'De trois garses'; see Marie-Claire Bichard-Thomine, *Noël Du Fail: conteur* (Paris: Champion, 2001), pp. 93-94.

²² *Les Sérées*, 6 vols, ed. C. E. Roybet (Paris, A. Lemerre, 1873-82; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1969), I, p. xii; cited by Simonin, p. 17, n. 8. 'Quod verum meum est', Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 12.11. Although Simonin claims Bouchet as a source for Bruscombille there do not appear to be any major borrowings (see *OC*, pp. 405, 410, 415, for some shared material, some of which is in any case commonplace). For critical commentary on the *Sérées*, see recent work by Neil Kenny, including "Lesquels banquets ... ont esté nommez ... des Latins *sodalitates*": discussing dreams over dinner in Guillaume Bouchet's *Sérées*', '*Sodalitas litteratorum*': *Études à la mémoire de/Studies in Memory of Philip Ford*, ed. by Ingrid A. R. De Smet and Paul White (Geneva: Droz, 2019), pp. 259-74.

or even thief rather than an ‘industriuse abeille’, all the better to allow him to borrow with impunity.

Bruscambille’s attempt to rehabilitate the humanist ideal of *imitatio* forms part of a broader claim to a particular social status as an actor-author, especially given that he expresses it in a letter to a prestigious dedicatee signed with his noble *nom de plume*, Des Lauriers. Indeed, unlike his contemporary Tabarin, whose dialogues with the charlatan Mondor were apparently written down by an audience member, we know that Bruscambille was the principal author of his speeches, since he was paid a small sum by the printers of the *Fantaisies* (1612).²³ In other words, his dedicatory letter to his next major collection is part of an overarching strategy of self-fashioning in the *Imaginations* especially, since this collection contains one of the earliest defences of the theatre in French.²⁴ The accusation of theft or plagiarism risks undermining all this, hence his riposte, which reveals a vulnerability inherent in his social standing, not least given his associations with farce, which are hard to reconcile with upward social mobility. Moreover, despite placing himself among the ‘auteurs modernes’, Bruscambille shares Rao’s somewhat apologetic view of their being among the last arrivals at the banquet, as if he had foreseen that he and others like him are about to become ‘anciens’.

Bruscambille’s letter also recalls Béroalde de Verville’s *Moyen de parvenir* (1616?), which is of course almost exactly contemporary with the *Imaginations* of 1613. The *Moyen* takes banquet literature in general, and the digestion metaphor for imitation in particular, to an absurd and often abject degree, as seen in a speaker’s comment about the book and/or banquet

²³ The printers were Jean Millot and Jean de Bordeaulx. Alan Howe discovered the evidence for this in the Archives nationales, Minutier central, XXIX, 164; see *OC*, pp. 20-21; see also *Œuvres complètes de Tabarin*, ed. by Gustave Aventin, 2 vols (Paris: Jannet, 1858), I, p. 8.

²⁴ *OC*, pp. 38-45, 379; see also Hugh Roberts and Annette Tomarken, ‘Bruscambille auteur dramatique et défenseur du théâtre’, *Le Dramaturge sur un plateau: quand l’auteur dramatique devient personnage*, ed. by Clotilde Thouret (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), pp. 285-99; François Lecercle, ‘An Elusive Controversy: the Beginnings of Polemics against the Stage in France’ and Clotilde Thouret, ‘Between Jest and Earnest: Ironical Defenses of Theatre in Seventeenth-Century England and France’, *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research*, 29 (2014), 17-34 and 35-55; Flavie Kerautret, ‘Les prologues de Bruscambille. Harangues d’un comédien “mercenaire” ?’, *European Drama and Performance Studies*, 9 (2017), *Écrire pour la scène (XV^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, 135-53.

‘Je fais bonne chère de ceci, puis, l’ayant digéré, je le baille à remâcher ainsi que, quand j’ay bien dîné je vais fienter, et un pourceau vient qui en fait son profit’.²⁵ Clearly, Rao, Bruscombille and Béroalde de Verville each present different dimensions of such metaphors for imitation, but even the actor’s attempted positive appropriation shows that the practice was under threat and in need of defence.

Cesare Rao’s *L’argute et facete lettere* (1562) are themselves examples of imitation that contain miscellaneous material, as well as mock encomia drawing on Agrippa and Lando, alongside elements of *commedia dell’arte* and ‘bizzarria’, to borrow Maria Cristina Figorilli’s term.²⁶ There is therefore a strong resemblance between Rao’s work and the prologues; given the similarity of their varied, serio-comic and sometimes farcical material, it is scarcely surprising that the comedian would plunder the compiler.²⁷ Indeed, the *facete lettere* were designed to encourage imitation, not least by individual readers redeploing suitable parts of the comic letters in their own correspondence or other writings. For instance, in a letter in which Rao complains of those who criticize anyone who puts pen to paper, he even pretends to abdicate authorship, passing this to his addressee and, by extension, his readership:

je qui suis l’auteur mesme vous prie [...] si vous trouvez icy chose qui vous offense, ou qui ne soit à vostre fantasie, vous reputiez ceste lettre vostre, & vous plaise changer, oster, adjouster, recomposer, retourner dessus dessous, corriger, gloser, adjouster en marge, & refaire en fin toute chose, comme vous voudrez [...]²⁸

²⁵ *Le Moyen de parvenir*, ed. by Michel Renaud (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 234 (chap. 55, ‘Canon’); cited in Jeanneret, *Des mets et des mots*, p. 237 (on banquet literature in the Renaissance in general, and *Le Moyen de parvenir*’s place in it in particular see pp. 221-46).

²⁶ See Figorilli, ‘*L’argute et facete lettere* di Cesare Rao’, p. 413 et seq.

²⁷ See also Pietro Giulio Riga’s characterisation of Rao’s work as among the most vivacious and typical of the ‘vario registro comico-paradossale cinquecentesco’, marked by use of ‘accumulazioni, ossimori, anafore, riprese proverbiali, allitterazioni e calembours che forniscono al testo un effetto saltellante’, *Dizionario biografico*.

²⁸ ‘A l’illustre & vertueux Seigneur Jean Vincent de S. Blaise Baron de Cannol’, *Lettres faceteuses*, pp. 295-300 (p. 299); Figorilli cites this passage in the original as part of her thesis that Rao encourages his readers to adopt the *ars combinatoria* he himself practises (‘*L’argute et facete lettere* di Cesare Rao’, p. 412).

Readers are thus invited to play with the text, to make it their own, in other words to imitate the *imitatio*, which is precisely what Bruscombille does. The almost Rabelaisian list of active verbs itself reveals that the adaptations Rao recommends are far from obvious. Moreover, with a subtlety that is somewhat atypical of *L'argute et facete lettere*, despite their title, Rao surrenders ownership all the better to claim the profit of his work.²⁹ He says his letter is no more his property than the sun or air (citing Ovid, coincidentally driving the point home that his writing is not his, but shared by all, in other words commonplace), yet he is willing to gift his compilation to whoever puts their name to it on the proviso that he is left with the 'usufruit'.³⁰ Cotgrave translates this term as 'The use, and profit (but not the property) of goods, with th'owner's consent' while he renders 'usufruitier' even more tellingly as 'one that hath the use, and reaped the profit, of a thing, whereof the propertie resteth in another'. As a result, what looks like resignation in the face of criticism and a renunciation of what we would now call intellectual property is transformed into a licence to borrow from anybody. This amounts to what we might uncharitably call a plagiarists' pact that he shares with Guillaume Bouchet and others: it is all common property anyway, and, somewhat perversely given the insistence on this kind of intellectual communism, a justification to claim the profits from such borrowing.

The latter point is not idle, since publication of commonplace or miscellaneous works of *facetiae* was a commercial venture. There are ethical, legal and financial implications to *imitatio* and, in somewhat different ways, these play out in Bouchet's preface to the *Sérées*, cited above. Similarly, in Montaigne's 'De l'institution des enfans' amidst a string of metaphors for imitation, including the inevitable bees also found in Rao and Bruscombille, he ironically notes that 'Les pilleurs, les emprunteurs mettent en parade leurs bastiments, leurs achats, non

²⁹ 'Argute' equates to 'subtiles' in the French title.

³⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 135-36; *Lettres facetieuses*, pp. 298-99.

pas ce qu'ils tirent d'autrui'.³¹ In other words, there is an economy of textual borrowing, in which authors and printer-booksellers participate, an open secret of intertextual 'usufruit'.

Tellingly, however, when Bruscombille borrows from this same letter, in his 'Prologue de la Calomnie' in the *Fantaisies* (1612), he omits the section in which Rao apparently renounces authorship.³² Instead, he recasts the letter to do the exact opposite, to draw attention to his status as an author by pretending to wish to withdraw his writing. Rao's letter plays on the idea of refusing to use his hands to write, but to devote them instead to other tasks. Bruscombille adopts the same conceit from the outset of his prologue, but adds typical elements of farcical humour and self-deprecating irony, hence he will use his hands, among other things not found in Rao, to 'manie[r] l'abricot de quelque nimphe' and not, therefore, to 'tracer un tas de fadeses'.³³ Placing Rao and Bruscombille side-by-side illustrates this key difference between them:

Rao:	Bruscombille:
Je me suis mis en fantasie de ne parler, faire le sourd, n'escire, & ne hanter personne, & dire à mes mains qu'elles ne fassent que se laver, se rongner les ongles, porter à la bouche, me laver le visage & faire autres choses necessaires [...]	je suis d'avis de contrefaire doresnavant le muet & le sourd, & dire à mes mains qu'elles ne s'amused plus à vous figurer avec la plume une quirielle de fantaisies [...] ³⁴

³¹ *Essais*, I, 26, 152c; 'bastiment' probably in the sense found among Cotgrave's translations which include 'a composition; or compaction of many things together'. It lies beyond the scope of this article to pursue this point further, but the commercial metaphor and reality of *imitatio* in late French Renaissance texts would be worthy of more analysis.

³² *OC*, pp. 292-95; see Roberts and Tomarken, 'Bruscombille auteur dramatique et défenseur du théâtre', pp. 294-95.

³³ *OC*, p. 292; 'l'Abricot d'une femme. i. la nature, par similitude de la fente', Antoine Oudin, *Curiositez françoises, pour supplement aux Dictionnaires* (Paris: A. de Somerville, 1640), p. 585.

³⁴ *Lettres facétieuses*, p. 296; *OC*, p. 293.

The comedian's creativity and indeed latent drama stand out: while Rao's proposed cessation of writing is just one element of a more general withdrawal from society, Bruscombille is much more focused on his threat of stopping the twin aspects of his role, namely writing and performing, all the better to draw attention to them. Hence 'figurer avec la plume' is ambiguous – it could mean to write, but, given the address to his hands that he has borrowed from Rao, it could equally be accompanied by performative gestures on stage. He uses 'quirielle' (more usually written 'kyrielle') ironically, but it is nevertheless suggestive of *copia* and, moreover, the 'fantaisies' in question are not simply imaginings or ideas, as Rao uses the term, but a self-reflexive allusion to the work in which this prologue was first published, the *Fantaisies*.³⁵ Self-deprecating formulae such as 'tas de fadeses' and 'quirielle de fantaisies' to describe his works are characteristic of this type of *captatio benevolentiae*.

Obviously, Bruscombille redeploys Rao's letter to very different ends to the Italian. His self-referential irony illustrates how he is above the game that Rao describes, so to speak, and is therefore more independent as an author. Nor is such self-mockery unique to this prologue, since it enables the actor-author to make his audience, and by extension his readership, complicit in his writing, which becomes a performance of sorts. This in turn enables him, among other things, to cement not only his own social standing but also that of professional theatre more generally.³⁶ His role as a *prologueur*, alone on the stage, means he has a dramatic need for such self-fashioning as it allows for a degree of control in what otherwise might be a vulnerable position, allowing him figuratively and literally to stand up for himself and his troupe. Humour plays a key part in these kinds of complex games of collusion with his audience and/or readers, since he invites them to share the joke and thereby join a community of sorts.

³⁵ Cf. Furetière's definition: 'KYRIELLE [...] Litanie, priere de l'Eglise en l'honneur de Dieu [...] composée de plusieurs invocations & éloges [...] Ce mot vieillit, & ne se dit gueres serieusement. KYRIELLE, se dit figurément en Morale, d'une longue suite de malheurs, de paroles, de citations & autres choses', *Dictionnaire universel* (The Hague/Rotterdam: Arnout/Reinier Leers, 1690).

³⁶ See Hugh Roberts, "'Au diable soient donnez les comediens": La haine dans des apologies du théâtre au début du XVIIIe siècle', *Littératures classiques*, 98 (2019), 65-75 (pp. 68-73).

In short, he is diametrically opposed to Rao's strategic disavowal of authorship. His tactic seems all the more clever as he perversely asserts his authorial independence through borrowing against the grain, almost as if this particular borrowing were a private joke.

Elsewhere, however, Bruscombille is not averse to justifying the profit motive in a way not dissimilar to that put forward by Rao. However, he tends to apply such discussions of finances less to his writing or to *imitatio* than to the business of the audience paying to see the troupe perform and their purchasing a copy of the prologues.³⁷ Indeed, the very availability of Rao's letters and similar material in French is testimony to a pan-European market in *facetiae*, as shown by the success *L'argute et facete lettere* enjoyed in Italy, with 15 or so sixteenth-century editions, demonstrating their adaptability in various contexts.³⁸ This generic flexibility also contributes to their appeal for a professional translator like Gabriel Chappuys, which is obviously part of the wider commercial interest in French translations of Italian works, especially in Lyon. As Chappuys puts it in the dedicatory letter that serves as a preface to his translation:

je vous presente ceste traduction des missives de Rao, que j'ay tournees en nostre vulgaire, (encores qu'elles en soyent bien dignes, pour la subtilité & facetic d'icelles) d'autant plus volontiers, que [j'ay] veu qu'elles ont esté imprimées en I[t]alien, pour le moins quatre fois, ce qui m'a faict certainement juger, outre les raisons susdites, qu'elles ne seront trouvées indignes de nostre langue.³⁹

Clearly, Chappuys is at least as interested in the commercial possibilities of the *Lettres facetieuses* as in their literary merits. Indeed, Chappuys, the most prolific professional translator

³⁷ *OC*, pp. 41-42; see also the articles by Kerautret, Roberts and Tomarken, and Roberts, cited above, and his allusion to his printer's profits, cited below.

³⁸ See Dechaud, p. 254.

³⁹ *Lettres facetieuses*, pp. 5-6.

of sixteenth-century France, was in Lyon at this time to make his living through translating for the city's printer-booksellers; the year of the publication of the *Lettres facétieuses* was his most intensely productive, with nine translations printed in a career that encompassed 69 of them.⁴⁰ Yet Chappuys could scarcely have imagined the reworkings his translation would undergo in the hands of another bestseller, Bruscombille.

2. Folly and pedantry

While Bruscombille borrows from a range of Rao's letters on various themes, his imitation of the opening two, on folly and pedantry respectively, deserves particular attention as the actor uses them to enable ironic self-reflection that is typical of the prologues in general and of their *imitatio* in particular. The *Lettres facétieuses* open with a lengthy piece, 'L'empereur des fols aux Archesages & grands maistres du monde', which ranges over 18 duodecimo pages. A praise of folly, many of its targets would have been familiar to anyone with even a passing awareness of Erasmus's *Moriae encomium* (1511), albeit that Rao, like Bruscombille, tends to ignore the humanist's religious satire. Bruscombille borrows from Rao's prolix piece in 'De la folie en general' of the *Imaginations*, but he significantly shortens and adapts it. His prologue is almost half the length of Rao's letter (10 duodecimo pages) but, as we shall show, he also adds his own material and incorporates passages from at least two letters by Rao, all of which illustrates, once again, how careful he was in selecting and adapting material.

The opening to Rao's letter, 'Entendez Archesages, entendez grands maistres du monde: entendez une nouvelle conception non encore ouye [...] Chacun me repute fol, voire l'Empereur des fols', sets a somewhat bombastic tone given its repeated imperatives, in stark contrast to Bruscombille's exordium, a typically playful example of knowingly false modesty without a direct equivalent in Rao: 'Si pour tracer quelque rime saupoudrée & sophistiquée, j'estois jugé

⁴⁰ Dechaud, pp. 15, 19, 42.

capable de servir seulement de goujat en la compagnie d'Apollon, je m'y alambiquerois la cervelle [...]'.⁴¹ While Rao moves on to a philosophical discussion that is scarcely comic ('Les Philosophes disent-ils pas, que se trouvent deux professions de l'homme sage, ne mentir, & manifester celuy qui ment? mais comme ainsi soit que tout homme est menteur, personne ne fait profession de sage, & consequent chacun est fol'), Bruscabille ignores this long-winded logic-chopping, to refer instead to a 'un certain sommelier d'Helicon', who heard one of the Muses whispering in his ear that '*Stultorum infinitus est numerus* : qui vaut autant à dire, afin que les sourds l'entendent, que le nombre des fols est infiny'.⁴² Bruscabille borrows the notion of the Muses informing him about universal folly from another one of Rao's letters, 'Craverio au Seigneur Cesar Rao': 'Et si est vray ce que vous dist ceste grande dame que vous rencontrastes à la montée de Parnasse ce dit sera verifié, *Stultorum infinitus est numerus*'.⁴³ Typically, however, Bruscabille has woven in his own verbal comedy, including, 'afin que les sourds l'entendent', the translation of the famous Latin, a knowing wink to more educated members of his audience. Such features doubtless stem from Bruscabille's theatrical practice: reading Rao's letters out loud would scarcely have engaged the audience, hence the 'spin' the comedian so regularly gives.

The main body of both Rao's letter and Bruscabille's prologue on folly is devoted to a list of standard objects of such satire, including women who put on make-up, lovers, poets, schoolchildren, doctors, merchants, and so on, albeit that the actor spares his audience many of

⁴¹ *Lettres facétieuses*, pp. 9-10; *OC*, p. 430; 's'alambiquer le cerveau' was a set expression for excessive concentration.

⁴² *Lettres facétieuses*, pp. 10-11; *OC*, p. 430. The Latin tag, from *Ecclesiastes*, 1.15 in the Vulgate, is a commonplace of writing on folly (see Carol Clark, '*Stultorum numerus infinitus*: Attitudes to Folly in the Sixteenth Century and in Rabelais', *Rabelais in Glasgow: Proceeding of the Colloquium held at the University of Glasgow in December 1983*, ed. by James Coleman and Christine Scollen-Jimack (Glasgow: 1984), pp. 113-24); Bruscabille himself alludes to it in an earlier mock encomium of folly, 'Prologue des Fols', in the *Fantaisies*, *OC*, pp. 324-27 (p. 325). Rao's philosophical remarks and syllogisms were borrowed in a text by an apparent rival of Bruscabille, who deploys them in his *Plaisantes idées du sieur Mistanguet, docteur à la moderne, parent de Bruscabille* (Paris: Jean Millot, 1615), pp. 23-24 (see *OC*, p. 571, n. 1), a further illustration of how useful a source Rao was for French writers of *facetiae*.

⁴³ *Lettres facétieuses*, p. 198.

the Italian writer's examples. Moreover, he almost invariably adds some element of humorous improvisation on Rao's commonplace themes. For instance, Bruscombille develops some scatological elements in his source material:

<p>Rao:</p> <p>Les Medecins sont-ils pas fols aussi, lesquels ont jour & nuict des urinaux, & phioles de verre pleines de pissat, qu'on leur presente, qui ont mal au cœur des excremens & des vomissemens des malades, qui ont la teste pleine de douleurs & de puanteur [...] [?]</p>	<p>Bruscambille:</p> <p>Les Medecins sont-ils pas fols aussi, lesquels au lieu de bausme aromatique, contentent leur odorat de la senteur d'une fiole pleine de pissat qu'on leur presente, avec un bassin plein de merde & un petit baston pour la remuer, la considerans de près avec leurs lunettes entravées sur le bout du nez ?⁴⁴</p>
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The humorous juxtapositions of the 'petit baston' with the 'bassin plein de merde', alongside the detail of the glasses, which are a standard accessory of the learned fool and, as we shall see, of Bruscombille himself, are in marked contrast to Rao, who is more didactic than comic. Similarly, while the *Lettres facétieuses* castigate those who think only of food and 'font leur Dieu de leur ventre', Bruscombille applies the irony to himself and hence away from the satirical target: 'Il y a une espece de fols qui n'ont l'esprit applicqué qu'à la cuisine, discourans tantost de l'excellence des saulces, tantost de la bonté des vins, ceux-là ne sont pas des plus fols à mon advis'.⁴⁵ In short, Bruscombille is not eclipsed by his source material; rather, he eclipses it by adding such elements in which his own playful, self-aware persona emerges. Admittedly, Rao does contain elements of self-mockery, as seen in his adopting an identity as the 'Empereur des fols', but Bruscombille adapts even this less didactic material to create an imagined dialogue

⁴⁴ *Lettres facétieuses*, p. 18; *OC*, p. 432.

⁴⁵ *Lettres facétieuses*, p. 23; *OC*, p. 432.

with his audience or readership that enlivens proceedings. He also omits Rao's allusion to the Sermon on the Mount, presumably because such material sits uncomfortably in the context of the prologues, which tend to downplay religious allusions, presumably for self-preservation:

<p>Rao:</p> <p>Après se trouvent autres fols-sages qui se mettent à considerer tous ces autres fols, & s'estimans sages, il[s] deviennent plus fols qu'eux, voulans refrener ceux cy, reigler ceux la, enseigner ces autres, & leur remonstrer, voyans la paille es yeux des autres, & ne jettans la poultre de leurs yeux.⁴⁶</p> <p>Je suis en après l'Empereur & chef de tous ceux là, pource que j'escry les folies d'autruy, & que je laisse les miennes, qui sont infinies.</p>	<p>Bruscambille:</p> <p>Il se trouve aussi d'autres fols sages, qui se mettent à considerer tous ces autres fols : Mais je dis quand à moy, que s'estimans sages, ils sont plus fols que les autres. Je seray donc l'Empereur des fols, me direz-vous, puisque discourant si librement des folies d'autruy, je laisse à part les miennes, qui sont presque infinies, & bien, je n'y contredis pas : je me suis déjà qualifié tel.⁴⁷</p>
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Again, the comedian goes beyond his source in a kind of pre-emptive defence of his position: he apparently admits to folly to paradoxically bolster his status, but typically his self-deprecation has its limits (his follies are '*presque infinies*', our italics).

The *pièce de résistance* of Bruscambille's adaptation of Rao's letter on folly occurs in the conclusion to his prologue, in a passage that has no equivalent in the *Lettres facétieuses*, but

⁴⁶ Matthew, 7.5.

⁴⁷ *Lettres facétieuses*, pp. 24-25; *OC*, p. 432. There are numerous examples of such imagined dialogues in the prologues, one of many features that indicate their theatrical origin, as discussed briefly above.

that takes the latter's self-reflexivity to a new level to stress, once again, the role of the actor-author in the production of his work:

Pour vous, messieurs les lecteurs, nous n'en dirons rien, puisque les folies qui vous poussent à la lecture de ces discours, si telle curiosité se doit appeller folie, sont autant de pieces de dix sols, ou de testons en la bourse de l'Imprimeur, je me garderay bien de dire ce que j'en pense, j'ayme trop son profit, & vostre contentement [...] ⁴⁸

This joke is revealing, not only of how Bruscombille must have adapted his performances for the printed page, but also of his awareness of his place in the book trade, something which is borne out by the evidence in the archives, as noted above. He is of course not the first to hold a mirror up to the audience or readership to involve them in the folly he describes. Nevertheless, in this instance he uses it, in a similar way to the 'Prologue de la calomnie', to draw attention to his status as an actor-author, which was still highly unusual in French writing at this time. ⁴⁹

In much the same way as Rao and Bruscombille present themselves as the 'Empereur des fols', both are also willing to don the gown of the pedant, albeit for significantly different purposes. ⁵⁰ Rao's piece, 'Le Pedant', is less obviously a letter than an extended mock encomium that weaves in a *novella* about one such schoolmaster. In contrast, Bruscombille's 'Prologue d'un pedant & d'une harengere' combines mock encomium with an imagined dialogue between Bruscombille as pedant and an eponymous and stereotypically sharp-tongued

⁴⁸ *OC*, pp. 432-33.

⁴⁹ See Roberts and Tomarken, 'Bruscombille auteur dramatique et défenseur du théâtre'; the status was less unusual for Italian performers and authors.

⁵⁰ On this issue more generally, see Jocelyn Royé, *La Figure du pédant de Montaigne à Molière* (Geneva: Droz, 2008).

fishwife.⁵¹ As ever, Bruscombille comically improvises on themes he finds in Rao; for instance, when dealing with corporal punishment we encounter the following:

<p>Rao:</p> <p>Si le Maistre reprend amiablement les disciples, ils disent qu'il est trop doux, s'il les advertit gracieusement, qu'il est trop pitoyable & humain, qu'il ne les sçait pas tenir en crainte, qu'il ne se fait pas craindre, qu'il est trop familier à ses escoliers, qu'il ne garde pas l'autorité d'un maistre: il ne faut jamais faire chere aux enfans. S'il les corrige, ils disent qu'il est trop rude, trop cruel, qu'il estropiera ses escoliers un jour, & puis qu'il gaignera au pied: les coups ne vont pas tousjours de mesure.</p>	<p>Bruscombille:</p> <p>s'il reprend amiablement ses disciples, ils diront qu'il est trop indulgent, s'il les advertit gracieusement, qu'il est trop pitoyable, qu'il ne les sçait pas tenir en crainte, qu'il est trop familier, qu'il ne garde pas l'autorité d'un Maistre, s'il les prend quelquesfois par les parties de derriere, comme les cuisiniers font les grenouilles, & qu'il leve quelque esguillette de leurs gregues naturelles⁵²</p>
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Bruscombille's humorous inventiveness makes his self-portrait as a pedant considerably less pedantic than his source, which allows him both to adopt the persona and to maintain an ironic distance from it.

In contrast, Rao appears to be haunted by the accusation of pedantry. Unlike the prologues, where such writing about writing is the exception, the *Lettres facétieuses* are full of a kind of self-obsessed rhetoric that constantly reflects on its own standards, revealing what we

⁵¹ Fishwives were of course synonymous with insults: see, for example, '*une Harengere. i. une femme qui dit des injures', Oudin, *Curiositez françoises*, p. 266.

⁵² *Lettres facétieuses*, p. 53; *OC*, p. 209; 'gregues' is another word for 'breeches', hence the 'gregues naturelles' are, naturally, the buttocks.

might call the paranoia of the pedant or even plagiarist. This anxiety underlies especially a passage in ‘Le Pedant’ in which Rao discusses schoolmasters’ publications, in which *imitatio* equates, once again, to theft:

Si un maistre d’escole fait aujourd’huy une composition, laquelle neantmoins soit docte & belle, tant qu’elle sçauroit estre, pourveu que lon sçache que l’auteur d’icelle soit un Pedant, elle est rejetee au loin [...] ils s’en torchent le cul, ils disent que les Pedans diffament les bonnes lettres, prennent de çà et delà, derobent de tous costez pour remplir le papier, assemblent toute maniere d’herbes, amassent de çà et delà, pour alonger leurs escrits, recopient les vieils livres [...] & changent seulement le nom: & la chose est aujourd’huy tant pratiquee que l’on cognoist une composition Pedantesque, à l’odeur seulement du nes.⁵³

‘[B]onnes lettres’ stand for something much more than the mindless copying of the hack. Instead, they constitute a humanist ideal of aligning the *utile* with the *dulce*. Rao seems to wish to consider his own composition ‘docte & belle’ but, doubtless inadvertently, he reveals a worry that his work may be rejected as pedantic. He even resorts to scatology, much less common for him than for his early seventeenth-century counterpart. Strikingly, Bruscombille chooses to exclude the section of this passage about what we would now call plagiarism:

Davantage, si un Petangorge, je veux dire un Pedagogue, fait sortir quelque composition au jour, pourveu que l’on sache que l’auteur d’icelle soit un Pedant, elle est rejetée & compassée comme le coing d’une vieille porte qu’on n’ouvre point, on ne la lit pas seulement, elle est vilipendée & deschirée, l’on s’en torche le cul, & la chose est

⁵³ *Lettres facétieuses*, p. 54.

aujourd’huy tellement practiquée, que l’on connoist une composition Pedantesque à l’odeur du nez [...] ⁵⁴

The feigned slip of the tongue at the opening of this passage is characteristic of the prologues. ⁵⁵ It also marks the point where Bruscombille deliberately slips in his unacknowledged borrowing from Rao, presumably because, unlike in his dedicatory letter to the *Imaginations*, he does not want to draw attention to his practice of *imitatio*. In other words, the omission indicates a limit to his role as pedant: he does not want to be tainted with such thieving and hack writing – this is not the place to hide his practice in the open, as he does in his letter.

Instead, he shifts focus from pedantry *per se* to the *harengère*’s invective, which he did not find in his Italian source. He thereby simultaneously moves attention away from a somewhat obsessive concern with the business of writing that typifies the *Lettres facetieuses* to the spoken language, which is of course far more characteristic of the prologues. Performing the pedant, Bruscombille goes to the place Maubert to purchase ‘quelque miserable aureille de Moruë, pour moy & mes disciples’. Offering the fishwife a derisory sum, she responds with ‘une illiade d’imprecations’, telling Bruscombille-as-pedant to ‘chercher au clair de la Lune tous les torcheculs qui sont au privez de ton College, pour faire bouillir un alloyau à la poivrade sur le rechault’. ⁵⁶ Turning to her fellow fishwives, the *harengère* draws their attention to the pedant’s ‘robe de pieces raportées’, as if his outfit were a metonym for the pedantic practice of piecing together other people’s writings.

⁵⁴ *OC*, p. 210.

⁵⁵ See Dominique Brancher, “‘When the tongue slips it speaks the truth’: tricks and truths of the Renaissance lapsus” (trans. by Annette Tomarken), *Gossip and Nonsense in Renaissance France and England*, ed. by Emily Butterworth and Hugh Roberts, special issue of *Renaissance Studies*, 30 (2016), 39-56 (particularly p. 50). ‘Pet en gorge’ was a type of child’s game, probably a variant of ‘pet en gueule’, i.e. wheelbarrow, one of the games of *Gargantua*, chapter 22.

⁵⁶ The expression, ‘une illiade de [...]’, for a long list, is used several times in the prologues (see *OC*, p. 713).

Not only is the pedant disparaged, but he is also emasculated and silenced: Bruscombille comments that he wanted to pull ‘une grande beste de mes chausses’, but elects instead to beat a hasty retreat to his college. By contrasting pedant and fishwife, Bruscombille adds a different dimension to what we find in Rao. Both characters have things to sell, be it produce or supposed learning. Yet the pedant is dominated financially and above all linguistically by the fishwife, whose spontaneous insults trump anything he could muster, making the pedant even more abject than in Rao’s version. Bruscombille demonstrates his mastery of these different social and rhetorical domains by performing both roles in his monologue. In so doing he demonstrates that he is beyond the normal rules of engagement, in much the same way as the king’s fool was supposed to be, which is precisely why he, like Rao, claims to be the ‘Empereur des fols’. The carnivalesque dethroning of the schoolmaster must have delighted his audience, for whom the pedagogy of real-life pedants may well have been a recent and perhaps somewhat painful memory. There are numerous indications of a shared humour born in the classroom, not least in frequent references to Despauterius’s ubiquitous Latin grammar, including in this very prologue.⁵⁷ He concludes with a list of mock oaths that he has taken from a much longer list in another of the *Lettres facétieuses*, ‘Mercure’, in which Rao adopts the voice of the messenger of the gods to rail against contemporary poetic practice and glosses.⁵⁸ Bruscombille’s imitation of his source is pragmatic: his focus is on his audience and readers, not on legislating for or against various kinds of writing. As a result, his appeal to ‘prendre en main la cause des pauvres Pedans’ is considerably more ironic than Rao’s bemoaning of their condition.

Conclusion

⁵⁷ See the joke reference to the pedant’s copy of Despauterius (1460?-1520), impossibly printed in the time of Lorenzo Valla (1407-57), *OC*, p. 210; for other allusions to Despauterius, see the index to *OC*, p. 797.

⁵⁸ *Lettres facétieuses*, pp. 56-63 (pp. 61-63).

Accusations of plagiarism against Bruscombille, Rao and others, are anachronistic and miss the vital, and very well-established, significance of *imitatio*. Beyond Renaissance rhetorical practice, obviously everything comes from somewhere or, to quote another verse of Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun. Hence if creativity is less about forming things *ex nihilo* than about reworking what you find, then Bruscombille's *imitatio* is undoubtedly creative, as *imitatio* was always supposed to be. Unsurprisingly, his jokes were themselves imitated, adapted and translated into neo-Latin to provide entertainment for learned readers in the Republic of Letters, in the highly successful *Nugae venales* (first edition, 1632), the title of which could stand for all commercialisation of *facetiae*.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, it would be reductive to see Bruscombille's *imitatio* as a simple example among countless others. His manipulation of Rao is uniquely revealing of his creativity, made all the more striking by his unusual status as an author-performer and *prologueur*, whose role involves self-fashioning, including occasional reflection on his writing and performance. For instance, in 'En faveur de la Scene', in the *Facecieuses paradoxes* (1615), he condemns rival *prologueurs* who are seen to

s'escrimer d'un Prologue comme d'une espée à deux mains, & s'en servant comme d'une selle à tous chevaux, donner à toute bride & à la traverse, pour prendre quelque autorité au colet ? mais le mal'heur pour ne cognoistre l'Autheur que par une escriture empruntée, & faute de bonnes lunettes pour discerner quelquesfois un u, d'avec une n, Voilà Monsieur l'Asne à courte oreille, les quatre fers contremont, l'ignorance est

⁵⁹ On this text, which had multiple seventeenth- and eighteenth-century editions, see Annette Tomarken, 'Borrowed nonsense: the *Nugae venales* and the prologues of Bruscombille', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 64 (2015), 321-37 and *OC*, pp. 74-75.

desmasquée, la voilà découverte, & la temerité de Monsieur le Prologueur recompensée d'une perpetuelle infamie [...]⁶⁰

He disparages others for asinine *imitatio* but not for imitating as such. By implication his 'lunettes à grand volume' are in good working order, hence he can legitimately incorporate his own 'écriture empruntée' from the *Lettres facétieuses* a few lines after this tirade.⁶¹ All this suggests that Rao was a very helpful, practical source for the *prologueur*. Such raiding of various sources was part of theatrical practice, in which there was of course constant borrowing, not least between French and Italian troupes and performers.⁶²

Obviously, Bruscombille was interested in exploiting, not emulating, his prolix source, hence he very frequently alters Rao radically. He is typically self-aware about his practice, as seen notably in a tellingly entitled 'Prologue Serieux & Facecieux', in which he replies to an imagined objection that he has been carried away with his own eloquence:

je le sçais en tout sens, & boy à toutes mains diverses. Le Peintre adapte les couleurs selon la diversité du singe dont il veut prendre la coppie : ainsi l'Orateur agence & façonne son discours à la semblance de ses conceptions dissemblables.⁶³

⁶⁰ *OC*, pp. 527-28; 'une Selle à tous chevaux. i. *un discours qui sert à toutes sortes de choses*', '* Asne à courtes oreilles [...] *un ignorant*', Oudin, pp. 18 and 502; 'infamie' is a particularly charged term, since Bruscombille himself defends the theatre generally against this charge (see *OC*, pp. 40-41): in other words, his condemnation of his unnamed rival could hardly be more scathing because he draws on a key term of opponents of the theatre.

⁶¹ *OC*, p. 528, a short paragraph on ignorance, which he borrows from 'L'Academie de Zanni à vous Academiques ignorans desire salut & perpetuelle felicité', *Lettres facétieuses*, pp. 206-13 (p. 207); his allusion to his glasses is found in *OC*, p. 535.

⁶² The most tantalizing example in the prologues is Bruscombille's 'Deffence de *Meum* & de *Tuum*', a remarkable mock encomium of private property, which was adapted into Italian by Domenico Bruni (see *OC*, p. 75 and n. 186); Bruscombille and Bruni may have been drawing on a common source that remains to be identified.

⁶³ *OC*, p. 164; the prologue was first published in 1609 but is cited here from the *Fantaisies* (1612); see also *OC*, pp. 59-60.

Bruscambille strikingly equates *imitatio* with *mimesis*.⁶⁴ The former is part of a broader serio-comic mode that deliberately embraces *varietas* of both *res* and *verba* to represent, in Montaignian fashion, ever shifting thoughts. By its very nature, *imitatio* involves a creative tension between what is the same and what is different between the new work and its source(s), which Bruscambille weaves into the apparent contradiction of the ‘semblance de [...] conceptions dissemblables’. Importantly, *mimesis* gives him licence to adopt both high and low registers as well as subject-matter, hence the painting is of a monkey, an ignoble subject which can itself copy human traits, suggesting multiple levels of mimicry and irony in his own writing and performance. His use of Rao’s *Lettres facétieuses* allows us to observe the mechanics of his imitation in a way he did not intend, but that shows that it was not so much monkey business as a highly sophisticated rhetorical method.

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⁶⁴ Cf. Michel Jeanneret’s comments, ‘L’*imitatio* a besoin de la *mimesis* [...] La *mimesis*, inversement, a besoin de l’*imitatio*’, *Des mets et des mots*, pp. 262-63.