Cyrano De Bergerac

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDMOND ROSTAND

Edmond Rostand was born in Marseille to a middle-class family of intellectuals. His parents encouraged him to study philosophy, literature, and history, and as a teenager Rostand enrolled in the prestigious Collège Stanslas in Paris. He published poetry during his twenties, and succeeded in putting on many plays even before he turned 25. In 1894, he saw the premier of one of his most popular works, *Les Romanesques*, the play that would form the basis for *The Fantasticks*, one of the longest running Broadway musicals of all time. His next play, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, was hugely popular when it premiered in 1897, and as a result Rostand became one of the most famous writers in Europe. His later efforts included plays about the Napoleonic Wars and Metternich, none of which measured up to the success of his earlier works. He died in 1918, one of the millions of victims of the global flu pandemic.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It's important to understand some French history when reading *Cyrano*. The majority of the play is set in 1640, when Louis XIII was King of France. Louis was widely regarded as a weak and ineffectual king, more interested in decadent parties than nation building. His most trusted advisor—and, supposedly, the "Grey eminence" of the French court—was Cardinal Richelieu, whose name is synonymous with power and prestige in *Cyrano*. During the reign of Louis XIII, France clashed with its neighbor, Spain, in a series of battles throughout the 1630s and 40s. At times, France invaded Spanish territory in an effort to expand its borders. In 1640, France attempted to invade the Spanish province of Arras, and for more than a year, French soldiers tried to starve out Spanish troops in their fortresses. The siege was largely a failure—indeed, it wasn't until 1654 (around the time when the final act of *Cyrano* is set) that France succeeded in conquering Arras. Finally, it's important to keep in mind that *Cyrano* takes place at a time when France was still building its identity as a modern nation-state. For centuries, the provinces of France had been only loosely connected, and it wasn't until the 1600s that these provinces began to be grouped together into a strong, stable state. Even in the 1640s, many Parisians—the dominant cultural group of France—regarded people from other parts of France with suspicion and amusement. People from the Gascon region of France—bordering Spain—were considered uncouth, similar to the stereotypes associated with American Southerners. It's easy to see this dynamic in *Cyrano*, as the wealthy and powerful characters regard the cadets of Gascon as foolish and crude.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Cyrano de Bergerac alludes to many famous European books. During the Siege of Arras, Cyrano reads from a book by the great French philosopher René Descartes—presumably the book is the *Principles of Philosophy*. Descartes was instrumental in the rise of the Enlightenment, and in books like *Principles of Philosophy*, he popularized the philosophical method known as systematic doubt, positing that the only entity that one can be sure exists is the mind—this sounds something like Cyrano's rugged, independent worldview. The play also alludes to various genres and styles of European literature. The love verses that Cyrano delivers to Roxane throughout the play imitate the convention of the Petrarchan sonnet. During the 1600s, new translations of the classical poet Petrarch resulted in a "boom" in love sonnets. In a love sonnet, the speaker usually professes his sincere, immortal love for a beautiful woman. Evidently, Cyrano has read some of these works, and riffs on them freely when speaking to Roxane. Finally, Cyrano's character resembles that of a Romantic hero-poet, such as Lord Byron. Byron—often praised for his "panache"—was famously free with his money, and wrote hundreds of romantic poems to the women he loved, including "She Walks In Beauty" and "When We Two Parted." It's entirely possible that Rostand, writing at the end of the 19th century, was thinking of the famous Lord Byron when he devised the character of Cyrano—a dashing, flamboyant, warrior-poet.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Cyrano de Bergerac
- **Where Written:** Paris, France
- **When Published:** Premiered in February of 1897
- **Literary Period:** Late Romanticism
- **Genre:** Tragicomedy
- **Setting:** Paris and Arras, mid-17th century
- **Climax:** The death of Christian in Act 4
- **Antagonist:** For most of the play, the Count de Guiche

EXTRA CREDIT

Move over, Shakespeare: There aren't many writers who get the chance to popularize a new word, but Edmond Rostand is one of them. The word "panache" has been around since the 1500s—in French, it refers to the plume that military commanders liked to wear on their helmets. But as Rostand used it, "panache" referred to flamboyance, bravery, and style—the qualities Cyrano embodies. Rostand's play was so popular that within a few years, "panache" was a familiar

English word!

May it please the court: Rostand isn't the only famous playwright to have been accused of stealing from other writers, but his is one of the more amusing plagiarism stories. In 1902, a Chicago writer named Samuel Eberly Gross brought a civil suit against Rostand, alleging that Rostand had stolen the idea for *Cyrano de Bergerac* from his own play, *The Merchant Prince of Corneville*, about a flamboyant man with a big nose. Rostand was forced to travel to America and attend a copyright trial in Chicago. Although he insisted that he'd never read or even heard of Gross's play, the judge concluded that Rostand's play was violating American copyright law. He issued a *permanent* injunction, declaring that Rostand's work never be performed in the United States. That's right—if you go to a performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in the United States, you're technically breaking the law.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Paris in 1640, a large, boisterous group of city-dwellers attends a bawdy play. At the play is a young, handsome Baron named Christian de Neuvillette. Lately, Christian has become enamored with a beautiful young woman. That night, he learns from a local drunk, Ligniere, that the woman's name is Roxane. Ligniere explains that Roxane is being pursued by the young, haughty Viscount de Valvert. Valvert is acting on the behalf of the powerful Count de Guiche, a man who's clearly attracted to Roxane, but who already has a fiancée.

As the play begins, a stranger shouts, "Stop!" and jumps onto the stage. The man, Cyrano de Bergerac, who has an enormous **nose**, explains that he has banned the play's principle actor, Montfluery, from ever appearing in a play again. Members of the audience complain that Cyrano is ruining the play, but they fall silent when Cyrano draws his sword. Cyrano's close friends, Le Bret and Ragueneau, explain that Cyrano is a talented, clever gentleman, and warn their peers not to make fun of Cyrano's nose. Valvert makes jokes about Cyrano's nose, and in response, Cyrano challenges Valvert to a duel. During the duel, Cyrano amazes the spectators of the play by composing an elaborate, insulting poem about Valvert on the spot, and he defeats Valvert just as he finishes his rhyme.

Cyrano, who serves as a soldier in the military, learns that Ligniere will be attacked by a vast army of 100 men that night. Cyrano also tells Le Bret and Ragueneau that he's in love with his cousin, who's revealed to be Roxane. Cyrano is afraid to confess his feelings, because although he's brilliant and eloquent, he thinks that his ugly face will surely disgust Roxane. That night, Cyrano receives word that Roxane wants to meet with him the next morning. Excited, Cyrano bravely volunteers to defend Ligniere from his enemies that night.

The next morning, Cyrano goes Ragueneau's pastry shop, where he's to meet with Roxane. The previous night, he's successfully defended Ligniere from 100 soldiers, inspired by his love for Roxane. Roxane arrives at the pastry shop and tells Cyrano that she has a secret to confess: she's in love with one of Cyrano's fellow soldiers in the army: Christian. Cyrano is visibly disappointed by this news, but he agrees to protect Christian from danger and find out if Christian loves Roxane in return.

After Roxane leaves, the Count de Guiche enters the pastry shop. Although he greets Cyrano as a friend, Cyrano broodingly ignores de Guiche, deeply offending the Count. Cyrano's fellow cadets crowd the pastry shop, eager to hear about Cyrano's fight the previous night. Cyrano notices Christian among the soldiers. Christian, who's new to the army, tries to prove his bravery by insulting Cyrano's nose. Furious but unable to take his revenge on Christian, Cyrano asks Christian if he loves Roxane. Christian replies that he does, but admits that he lacks the verbal skills necessary to woo Roxane. Cyrano produces a love letter (which, unbeknownst to Christian, he's written for Roxane) and tells Christian to give it to Roxane in his own name. Christian gratefully accepts the letter, not realizing that Cyrano loves Roxane. Together, Cyrano and Christian plan to seduce Roxane, with Christian serving as the "face" of the operation and Cyrano supplying the eloquent words.

A few weeks later, Christian has successfully wooed Roxane, sending her letters composed by Cyrano. The time has come for Christian to meet Roxane face-to-face. When Christian first speaks to Roxane, he's so tongue-tied that Roxane is deeply disappointed—because of Cyrano's letters, she'd been expecting a genius. Humiliated, Christian runs away. Next, Roxane crosses paths with the Count de Guiche, who's still madly in love with her. De Guiche begs Roxane for the chance to see her later that night—he explains that he's being shipped out to fight in Arras soon. Knowing that if de Guiche is sent to fight, Christian and the other soldiers will have to go with him, Roxane tells de Guiche to see her later that night.

Later in the night, Christian and Cyrano go to Roxane's house to woo her. Roxane, standing at her window, is at first reluctant to speak any further to Christian. But Cyrano, imitating Christian's voice, succeeds in impressing her, with Roxane unaware that the man she's listening to is her cousin, not Christian. Roxane is so overcome with love for "Christian" that she tells him to come into her house so that they can embrace one another. Meanwhile, a Monk walks to Roxane's house on behalf of Count de Guiche. Roxane cleverly tricks the Monk into marrying her to Christian on the spot. By the time the Count arrives at Roxane's home, she's married to Christian. Furious, de Guiche vows to have Cyrano and Christian shipped to the front lines in the Siege of Arras. Before Cyrano and Christian are shipped off to fight, Roxane makes Cyrano promise to make sure Christian writes to her often.

At the Siege of Arras, there is a horrible famine, and Christian senses that he's starving. Cyrano writes long, romantic letters to Roxane, always signing them with Christian's name. One day, the Count de Guiche arrives at the soldiers' camp and announces that a battle is about to take place. Suddenly, Roxane arrives at the camp. She explains that she's become so overcome with love for Christian—thanks to Cyrano's letters—that she felt compelled to come see him. Roxane explains that she's fallen in love with "Christian's" eloquence and wit—at this point, she doesn't care what he looks like. Christian secretly finds this disturbing, since it means that Roxane is actually in love with Cyrano.

As the battle is about to begin, Cyrano gives Christian one last letter to give Roxane, in case he's killed. Christian begins to realize the truth: Cyrano loves Roxane just as much as he does. Christian insists that Cyrano must tell Roxane the truth. Just as Cyrano is about to admit his feelings to Roxane, though, there's a shot: Christian falls dead, the first casualty of the battle. Cyrano realizes that he can never tell Roxane how he feels. After Christian's death, Roxane goes to live in a convent and mourn her dead husband.

Fifteen years later, Cyrano has become a lonely, unpopular man. His aggressive manner and penchant for fighting has made him dozens of enemies. Every week, he goes to visit Roxane at her convent, but he never admits that he loves her.

One day, de Guiche—now a powerful Duke—comes to visit Roxane at her convent. He warns Le Bret and Ragueneau, Cyrano's last remaining friends, that someone is about to ambush Cyrano by dropping a heavy weight on his head, and they run off to alert him. Shortly afterward, Cyrano shows up at the convent, his hat pulled low over his head. Cyrano and Roxane talk about their lives, and reminisce about Christian. Roxane produces the letter Christian wrote her, and Cyrano begins quoting the letter from memory. Roxane realizes that Cyrano was the one who wrote Christian's letters.

Suddenly, Le Bret and Ragueneau rush back—they were too late. Cyrano takes off his hat, revealing a heavy bandage: he's already been attacked, and is slowly dying of his wounds. Tearfully, Roxane, Ragueneau, and Le Bret rest Cyrano on the ground. Moments from death, Cyrano tells Roxane that he's always loved her. Roxane, weeping, tells Cyrano that she'll always remember him, just as she's remembered Christian ever since his death. With his final breaths, Cyrano claims that there's one thing he'll take with him to heaven when he dies: his "panache."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Cyrano de Bergerac – The titular character of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is disarmingly brilliant, highly eloquent, and good in a fight, but also cursed with an abnormally large **nose**—in short, he has an ugly face but a beautiful mind. Cyrano's defining quality is his "panache," that is, his flamboyant, sometimes aggressive style, which compels him to duel with anyone who insults his nose. In more ways than one, Cyrano is an outsider in 17th century France. He's fiercely proud and independent—though he seems to rely on friends for money, he gives away money freely and easily. Moreover, he picks fights with almost anyone who disagrees with him, refusing to show "proper" respect for his superiors. Yet in spite of Cyrano's rudeness and combativeness, he's shown to be a gentle, loving soul. He's capable of forming lasting friendships, often with those who are lower on the social totem pole than he. He's also deeply in love with his cousin, Roxane, though he believes that this love can never amount to anything, since he's too ugly to charm Roxane. It's for this reason that Cyrano agrees to help Christian seduce Roxane—a plan that results in Christian's marriage to Roxane. Ultimately, Cyrano is a comedic figure, but also a sympathetic, heroic, and even noble character as well. He stands up for himself, values love, friendship, and art above everything else, and adheres to a strong moral code.

Baron Christian de Neuvillette – Christian is a foil to Cyrano de Bergerac: a shallow, inexperienced, slow-thinking man who's been blessed with a beautiful face. By himself, Christian could never woo Roxane, as he doesn't have the brains or wit. Only when he and Cyrano work together—Christian supplying the physical beauty, Cyrano providing beautiful love letters—do they succeed in seducing Roxane. Where Cyrano is capable of admiring a woman for her mind and soul as well as her physical beauty, Christian seems to love women for their beauty and nothing else. But while Christian isn't a deep thinker or a noble hero, Rostand shows that he's still a decent man, and capable of acts of great kindness. Shortly before he's killed in the Siege of Arras, for example, Christian discovers that Cyrano loves Roxane, too, and selflessly insists that Cyrano tell Roxane about his feelings. In the end, Christian attains a kind of dignity for himself, in spite of his weak mind, and it's partly out of personal respect for Christian that Cyrano refuses to tell Roxane about his feelings until the very end of the play.

Magdalene Robin / Roxane – Roxane is the beautiful, charismatic, and witty cousin of Cyrano de Bergerac. She's known Cyrano since they were both children, and trusts him completely, though she isn't aware that he's in love with her. Early on, Roxane falls in love with a man whom she believes to be Baron Christian de Neuvillette, though in actuality the "man" is a combination of Christian's face and Cyrano's words. Roxane must also fend off the advances of the Count de Guiche, who desires her almost as much as Christian and Cyrano do. Roxane is much more than a mere "love interest," however, and throughout the play she demonstrates her considerable wit—a wit matched only by Cyrano. Roxane's other virtues include her constancy, as after Christian's tragic death she mourns him for

15 years, confirming her love for "Christian," an eloquent, handsome man who quite literally doesn't exist.

Count de Guiche – The Count de Guiche is arguably the most confusing character in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. As the play begins, he's clearly a villainous character: a corrupt, leering aristocrat who quarrels with Cyrano, the hero, and who wants to use his power to force Roxane to love him. During the Siege of Arras, we see that the Count is a coward—willing to boast of his high rank by wearing a **white plume**, but only when wearing it won't endanger his life. And yet the Count seems capable of acts of decency and respect, as well. During the famine he bonds with his troops, the Gascon cadets, and seems to be shedding his pretentiousness and privilege. In the final act of the play, we learn that de Guiche has ascended to become a powerful duke. Puzzlingly, de Guiche may be responsible for one or both of the major tragedies in the play: the death of Christian and the death of Cyrano. It's impossible to know for sure whether de Guiche has orchestrated these characters' murder out of a desire for revenge, or if the deaths are strictly accidents. As with so many plays, it's up to the director and the performers to offer their own interpretation of this ambiguous character.

Ragueneau – A poor, struggling man who performs many different jobs during the play, usually because of his friend Cyrano de Bergerac's help. At the start of the play, Ragueneau is a popular pastry chef who runs a popular business, but loses money because of his own generosity. When his wife, Lise, leaves him, Ragueneau begins working for Roxane, thanks to Cyrano's recommendation. Years later, Ragueneau is still working for Roxane, though he remains fiercely loyal to his friend Cyrano—indeed, Cyrano dies with Ragueneau close beside him.

Viscount de Valvert – A young nobleman who tries and fails to woo Roxane on behalf of the Count de Guiche (who can't do so himself, since he's engaged to another woman). Valvert is proud, rude, and spiteful, and after he insults Cyrano de Bergerac's large **nose**, it's satisfying for the characters (and us) to watch Cyrano defeat him in a duel.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Le Bret – A close friend and fellow soldier of Cyrano de Bergerac.

Captain Carbon de Castel-Jaloux – A young, brave captain in the Gascon cadets, who commands but also respects Cyrano de Bergerac.

Ligniere – An old drunkard, with whom Cyrano de Bergerac is friendly. Although he's an alcoholic, Ligniere is highly resourceful, and helps out many of the characters in the play: he knows everyone's name, and learns many of the characters' important secrets.

First Marquis – A young nobleman who attends the play in Act 1.

Reporter – A journalist who asks Cyrano de Bergerac to recount his heroic fight with 100 men.

Guardsman – A soldier who flirts with the Flower-girl at the play in Act 1.

Montfleury – A talentless, incompetent actor who acts in the play in Act 1, despite the fact that Cyrano de Bergerac has banned him from performing.

Bellerose – An employee of the Hotel de Bourgogne.

Sister Martha – A nun at the convent where Roxane stays after Christian's death.

D'Assoucy – An associate of Cyrano de Bergerac, who loses a bet with Cyrano.

Baron de Cuigy – A young nobleman who attends the play in Act 1.

Baron de Brissaille – A young nobleman who attends the play in Act 1.

The Bore – A theater patron who antagonizes Cyrano de Bergerac in Act 1.

Buffet Girl – An employee of the Hotel de Bourgogne, who offers Cyrano de Bergerac free food.

Mother Marguerite de Jesus – The mother superior at the convent where Roxane goes after Christian's death.

Musketeer – A handsome soldier who flirts with Lise, and later runs off with her.

Second Musketeer – A soldier who insults Cyrano's **nose**, wrongly thinking that Cyrano is no longer sensitive about his appearance.

Balthazar Baro – The author of the play being performed at the Hotel de Bourgogne in Act 1.

Trooper – One of the patrons of the play in Act 1.

Flower-Girl – A patron of the play in Act 1.

The Duenna – An attendant and nurse to Roxane.

Pickpocket – A thief who warns Christian that Ligniere is going to be attacked.

Lise – The flirtatious wife of Ragueneau. She leaves her husband for a handsome Musketeer after Act 2.

Monk – A foolish priest who's sent by the Count de Guiche to meet with Roxane, and winds up marrying Roxane to Christian.

Sister Claire – A nun at the convent where Roxane stays after Christian's death.

Cardinal Richelieu – An advisor to the French King and the most powerful person in France. Richelieu is the uncle of De Guiche, and De Guiche name-drops a number of times in the play that his uncle is willing to help him in certain ways. Richelieu never actually appears in the play.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

APPEARANCES AND IDENTITY

From the first scene of Act 1—in which patrons gather in a theater to watch a play-within-the-play—it's clear that *Cyrano de Bergerac* is a play about acting, appearances, and illusions. In the course of its five acts, Rostand offers some surprising ideas about the philosophy of appearances, which challenge and sometimes flatly contradict the cliché that "true beauty comes from within."

Part of the conceit of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is that Christian de Neuvillette, in spite of his handsome face, is ill-equipped to woo the beautiful Roxane, because he's not particularly bright: one could say that "deep down" he's less attractive than his face would suggest. It's only with the help of Cyrano de Bergerac, an ugly, **big-nosed** man with a sharp wit and a talent for eloquent turns of phrase, that Christian succeeds in wooing Roxane. Cyrano, secretly in love with Roxane himself, sends her letters in Christian's name, and even speaks for Christian. By themselves, neither Christian nor Cyrano could woo Roxane—one is too ugly, and the other is too foolish. Only the combination of Christian's face and Cyrano's words can do the trick.

At times, *Cyrano* suggests that words and ideas are a better expression of one's true nature than are physical appearances. Roxane's love for Cyrano's letters seems more "real" than her attraction to Christian's face, because the former comes dressed in beautiful language, while the latter is only skin-deep. When Cyrano speaks to Roxane, pretending to be Christian, his voice is hesitant at first, but as his words become more passionate, his voice grows more comfortable. The overall impression is that Cyrano is expressing his real feelings for Roxane, displaying a wise and sensitive soul with which the shallow Christian could never compete.

And yet the play also implies that on a certain level, one's words are no more "real" than one's face. At other points in the play, Rostand makes it very clear than Cyrano's words are another kind of performance. Cyrano uses poetry and witty insults to construct an image of himself as a proud, aggressive, and intimidating man. He even composes poetry while dueling with an enemy, the Viscount Valvert, in front of a big crowd of onlookers—a clear sign of the way he uses words and outward appearances as weapons. The inadequacy of language—the fact that words, even at their best, only "seem"—is clear during the course of Cyrano and Christian's seduction of Roxane. Cyrano's words can be manipulated and misattributed. As a result, Cyrano and Christian craft a third, fictitious human being—blessed with Christian's face and Cyrano's voice—who appears to exist, but doesn't.

In the end, then, *Cyrano* sets up a problem that's familiar to anyone who's ever been involved in putting on a play: how can outward appearances, such as faces, mannerisms, gestures, words, and speeches, possibly convey who a person "truly" is? At times, it's suggested that some outward appearances—like Cyrano's letters and speeches—*can* convey a sense of a person's true personality, their "inner life." And yet Rostand also advances a more radical possibility: outward appearances *are* humans' true personality. Nowhere is this clearer than in the final moments of the play, during which the dying Cyrano tells Roxane that his defining trait—the one thing that separates him from all other people—is his "panache": i.e., his daring, his style, his appearance of energy. Like everyone else, Cyrano has an inner life, with his own secrets, hidden desires, etc. And yet his actions—that is, his many performances and appearances—are what truly define him.

THE MANY KINDS OF LOVE

The predominance of appearances, words, and faces in *Cyrano de Bergerac* presupposes love between different characters—without love, there would be no need for Cyrano and Christian de Neuvillette to craft elaborate lies and draft long letters to Roxane. And yet because *Cyrano* presupposes the existence of love, it's often hard to say, what, exactly, real love *is*, especially because the play challenges our intuitive definition of love as a sincere, honest bond between two souls. In *Cyrano*, love seems to hinge on lies, elaborate disguises, and 15-year-long cons.

One way to begin talking about love in *Cyrano* is to ask why Cyrano is in love with his cousin, Roxane. Cyrano's love shows elements of the Platonic ideal: the notion, named for the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, that love should be based on people's attraction to one another's minds or souls, rather than their bodies. Cyrano has known Roxane since they were both children, and has accumulated an enormous amount of knowledge about her personality, her interests, and her views of the world. Furthermore, we see during the course of the play that Roxane is intelligent, well-spoken, and quick-witted: in other words, the perfect intellectual match for Cyrano. And yet Cyrano clearly doesn't believe that love can ever be only Platonic. He's embarrassed by his big **nose** and ugly face, and senses that Roxane could never love him solely for his mind, since she'll never be able to "move past" his physical features. This further suggests that Cyrano is attracted to Roxane for her physical beauty as well as her mind (indeed, Cyrano rhapsodizes about Roxane's eyes and face far more than he rhapsodizes about her brains). One could say that Cyrano

offers up a definition of love as both physical and spiritual: in other words, there's nothing improper or shallow about being attracted to someone for their looks as well as for their mind. This form of love seems vastly superior to the love that Christian feels for Roxane, especially by contemporary standards. Whereas Cyrano takes the time to get to know Roxane, Christian declares his love for Roxane as soon as he's seen her beautiful face.

So far, the characters in *Cyrano* exemplify two different forms of love: love that is both physical and intellectual, and love that is purely physical (and, we're tempted to add, shallow). Roxane, on the other hand, seems to best exemplify the more "pure" Platonic ideal of love. For the first half of the play, Roxane is attracted to Christian for his good looks and—she thinks—his sophisticated mind. Yet by Act 4, Roxane claims to have moved past her physical attraction altogether: she says that she loves Christian for his mind, and only his mind. Though this seems like the most "ideal" form of love in the play, it's also hard to say whether we should take Roxane at her word. It's easy for Roxane to pay lip service to Platonic love, because the fact remains that while she claims that she doesn't care about her husband's physical beauty, Christian still *is* beautiful. But after Christian's death, Roxane spends 15 years mourning his loss—her love is clearly enduring and faithful, long outlasting the "shallowness" we might think of as associated with a strictly physical attraction. And yet she's also mourning a human who didn't really exist: someone who had Christian's face and Cyrano's eloquence.

It's not until the final pages of *Cyrano* that Roxane has a chance to prove the Platonic nature of her love. After 15 years, Cyrano reveals that he's always loved Roxane, and that it was he who wrote the beautiful letters that made Roxane fall for Christian. It's clear that Cyrano is only revealing his secret to Roxane because he knows that he's about to die—indeed, before Roxane can respond to Cyrano's admission that he loves her, Cyrano has drawn his last breath. The "test" of Platonic love—that is, whether Roxane could truly love an ugly man with a beautiful mind—ends as soon as it begins, even though it's suggested that Roxane would have "passed" that test. *Cyrano* ends without advancing a clear definition of what "good" and "bad" love look like. The implicit message is that there are many kinds of love, ranging from Platonic to anti-Platonic, all of which have some redeeming value. Christian's love may be shallower than Cyrano's, but evidently they're both strong and sincere—both men love Roxane even to the point of death. And as Roxane's case proves, it's also possible to feel true love for a person that doesn't even exist. Though there's always an element of play and deception in love, love itself is the most important and the most truthful part of the characters' lives.

PANACHE

The last word of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is "panache," which Webster's Dictionary defines as "dash or flamboyance in style and action." It's worth investigating the history of this word—which Rostand's play popularized—a little further.

Originally, "panache" was a French word referring to a plume on a military helmet. The famous French monarch Henry IV was fond of wearing a white plume on his helmet whenever he fought in battle, and he even told his soldiers that they should "follow his panache" on the battlefield. *Cyrano* alludes to this famous story in Act 4, when the Count de Guiche—evidently, someone without much panache—claims that he wears a **white scarf** to demonstrate his high rank, and yet he takes off the scarf in battle for fear of making himself into a target. Cyrano de Bergerac then reveals that he's taken the Count's scarf and worn it himself. In *Cyrano*, the white scarf (or plume)—originally a symbol of awed obedience to one's social superiors—transforms into a symbol of social subversion, flamboyant disobedience to authority, and a reckless bravery that also advertises its own recklessness: in short, Rostand's updated, 19th century version of panache.

Where does Cyrano's panache—the one quality of which he's most proud—come from? *Cyrano* doesn't conceal the fact that Cyrano is insecure about his physical appearance: *i.e.*, his big **nose**. Surrounded by bullies who tease him for his face, Cyrano compensates (and arguably *over*compensates) by perfecting the arts of dueling, arguing, and verbally besting his enemies. When the Viscount Valvert lobs a minor insult at Cyrano, Cyrano responds by challenging Valvert to a duel on the spot, during which Cyrano composes a ballad insulting Valvert. Evidently, Cyrano has had a lifetime of practice—the crowd whispers that Cyrano attacks anyone who insults him.

But Cyrano's panache is less petty and personal than mere insecurity—panache also represents a proud and often brave way for him to live his life. Cyrano refuses to apologize for his ugly appearance, and indeed flaunts his large nose as part of his persona, jumping on any reference to his nose as a chance to display his verbal and dueling skills. Instead of giving in to society's insults, Cyrano celebrates his physical and intellectual talents in the grandest way imaginable. One could say that panache is a way of attaining freedom: freedom from social expectations of obedience, as well as from one's own insecurities.

In the end, however, Cyrano's panache has dire consequences. He makes so many enemies in his city that by Act 5, he can barely get through a day without having to defend himself. An unknown enemy attacks him by dropping a heavy piece of wood on his head, injuring and ultimately killing him. Still, the fact that Cyrano's panache comes back to haunt him doesn't necessarily mean that it is a negative trait. On the contrary, Cyrano's death

lends panache a kind of nobility. Cyrano's dying word is "panache"—evidently, he has no regrets for the way he's lived his life. Like so much else that is noble and beautiful in *Cyrano* (love, for example), panache doesn't last very long in real life. And yet even though Cyrano, dies, the *idea* of panache lives on forever: in Cyrano's reputation, his friends' memories of his heroic deeds, and in the play itself. This is the heroic tradeoff that Cyrano, and any other exemplar of panache, must make: the tragedy of a short life, but also the glory of an everlasting reputation.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND THE ROMANTIC IDEAL

Although *Cyrano de Bergerac* takes place in the 17th century, it was written at the end of the 19th century, and Rostand looks back on 200-year-old French society with a mixture of admiration and disdain. One of the most foreign aspects of life in 17th century France—almost as strange to Rostand as it is to us—is the prevalence of a strict social hierarchy, one rooted in religion and the landed aristocracy.

Especially in the first half of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Rostand carefully paints a picture of the social pyramid in France. At the top of the pyramid are kings and cardinals. While neither appears directly in the play, the powerful characters who *do* appear in the play like to cite their close relationships with those at the top of the pyramid. For example, the Count de Guiche orchestrates most of his plots using his close ties to Cardinal Richelieu, his uncle (not to mention the most powerful man in France in the early 1700s). On the lower levels of the pyramid, then, characters like the Count assert their power over their inferiors through militarism. The Count commands a vast number of soldiers, and some of these soldiers, such as Cyrano himself, have their own subordinates, who are mere cadets. The law of French society is simple: obey one's superiors at all costs.

In no small part, Cyrano is the hero of his own play because he refuses to "play along" with the laws of 17th century society—he's a 19th century man living 200 years before his time. Cyrano reverses the social pyramid, befriending those who are "beneath" him, and showing blatant contempt for those, like de Guiche, who are above him. In many ways, Cyrano embodies the values of the Romantic era, the cultural movement that dominated European art and literature for most of the 19th century. Like a Romantic hero, Cyrano rejects the antiquated authority of the church and the monarchy. Instead of accepting his place in the hierarchy—dependent on those above him, tyrannical to those below—Cyrano instead opts for a rugged independence, arguably the quintessential Romantic trait. Almost fanatically sure of the power of art to nourish the soul, Cyrano claims that he can survive on poetry instead of food—a line that wouldn't be out of place in a Romantic poem by Percy Shelley.

The downside of opting out of the social hierarchy, of course, is that it's hard to eat only poetry. At the beginning of the play, Cyrano has some access to money, but as time goes on, and he becomes more and more Romantic and ruggedly independent, he alienates almost everyone around him. As a result, Cyrano is forced to go hungry for days and live in cruel poverty. In the end, Cyrano's Romanticism kills him—because he doesn't play along with social norms, his enemies murder him (and it's implied that this enemy might be the Count himself). Yet this is a fitting ending—arguably the *only* fitting ending—for a Romantic hero living in immoral times. As a rugged, independent hero, Cyrano cannot survive for very long. His life outside the hierarchy is meteoric—brief but spectacular.

LOYALTY AND HONOR

The paradox of *Cyrano de Bergerac*—and the source of a lot of its comedy—is that Cyrano, a man who prides himself on his independence, his "panache," and his refusal to serve a master, must keep his word to another man: the clumsy, foolish Christian de Neuvillette. In general, the play explores the nuances of loyalty and honor by studying the relationships between Christian, Cyrano, and Roxane.

To begin with, Cyrano sacrifices his most important assets—his pride and honor—out of a sense of romantic loyalty to Roxane. He's made a name for himself throughout town by defending his honor: i.e., attacking anyone who criticizes his enormous **nose**. Yet because Roxane loves the handsome Christian, she makes Cyrano promise to take care of Christian at all costs. Cyrano is then forced to sit in (hilarious) silence when Christian insults Cyrano's nose, knowing that he can't fight the young man because of his loyalty to Roxane and her wishes.

The reason that Cyrano agrees to mentor Christian, remaining loyal to a young man for whom he seems to have little real respect, is more complicated than it might seem. While it's true that Cyrano is acting because of his feelings for Roxane—he doesn't dare disobey the love of his life, no matter how painful the consequences of obeying might be—Cyrano also agrees to help Christian because doing so gives him the opportunity to express his own love for Roxane. Cyrano's loyalty to Christian is an act of both self-interest and selflessness. Cyrano sacrifices some of his pride and honor, but in return, he gets the unique opportunity to seduce Roxane without the embarrassment of rejection. Here, Rostand suggests that loyalty is distinct from and sometimes contradictory to love: it is both selfish and selfless, and doesn't necessarily align with one's romantic feelings.

As the play goes on, Cyrano's motives for loyalty to Christian become harder to articulate. He swears to protect Christian at all costs, but when Christian dies in battle, Cyrano still doesn't

reveal his love for Roxane. His guilt at having allowed Christian to die keeps him silent for the next 15 years, and it's only when he's on his deathbed that he reveals how he truly feels. Cyrano's loyalty to Christian is an important part of his character. Although he's under no real obligation to keep his feelings hidden after Christian's death, he continues to do so out of a sense of *honor*. Although Cyrano has sacrificed his pride and reputation to protect Christian, he then asserts his honor—that is, his honesty, his integrity, etc.—by remaining loyal to Christian and keeping his painful secret. Without this loyalty and honor, Cyrano would be a fundamentally selfish character, and his desire to assert his independence would appear selfish and tiresome—but because of these qualities, Cyrano transcends selfishness and becomes an impressive, even noble character. In spite of his desire to be free of social norms, he also has a strong sense of honor and a rigid moral code, tethered not only to his love for Roxane, but also to his concept of himself as being a man of his word.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CYRANO'S NOSE

The most obvious symbol in *Cyrano de Bergerac* is the title character's enormous nose. Cyrano de Bergerac is talented, witty, and good in a fight, but because he has an abnormally large nose, he's unable to win himself any female admirers. On one level Cyrano's nose is an argument against the notion that a beautiful mind goes with a beautiful face. Intelligence, virtue, and wisdom have no real correlation with physical features—a fact that seems obvious, but is also easy to forget. As another example of this idea, Christian, who is Cyrano's rival for the beautiful Roxane, is a young, handsome man, but he's also foolish and clumsy. Thus Cyrano's nose is a symbol of the arbitrariness of the idea of "beauty" in a human face, and also of the shallowness of many human relationships, which focus too much on physical appearance and disregard the mind and the spirit.

This symbol goes a bit deeper as well, however, as Cyrano himself has a complex relationship with his nose. On one hand, he feels insecure about it and thinks that women consider him hideous, so he doesn't even *try* to pursue the woman he loves—Roxane—because he assumes she would be disgusted by his appearance. This is a mistake based on Cyrano's low self-esteem regarding his nose, because it seems abundantly clear that Roxane is an intelligent, complex individual who could easily love someone for other qualities than physical beauty (indeed, she outright rejects the handsome Christian when he is awkward and dull in their first encounter). In some way, Cyrano makes his nose into a bigger obstacle to his happiness than it otherwise might be. In matters of pride and "panache," however, Cyrano seems to flaunt his nose and use it as a point of contention by which he can prove his wit and fighting skill. When Valvert clumsily insults the nose, Cyrano doesn't seem actually hurt at all, but rather pounces on this opportunity to mock Valvert for his feeble insult and thus display his own verbal virtuosity. Most people know not to mention Cyrano's nose, as he is "sensitive" about, but he is also very publicly and even *proudly* sensitive about it. Ultimately Cyrano's nose is thus a complicated symbol that plays several roles in displaying how physical features affect a person's inner life and relationship to the world.

THE WHITE SCARF

During the Siege of Arras, the Count de Guiche tells his troops that he wears a white scarf on his uniform so that everyone can recognize that he's a nobleman. And yet when de Guiche enters battle, he takes off his insignia, for fear that it will make him an easier target for enemy combatants. Humorously, we learn that Cyrano de Bergerac then takes this scarf from across enemy lines and wears it himself during the battle, even though doing so endangers his life. The white scarf is thus a clear symbol of "panache"—indeed, the word "panache" originally referred to the plumes that commanders wore in battle, and particularly the white plume (like de Guiche's white scarf) warn into battle by the famous French monarch Henry IV. Cyrano, who chooses to live his life boldly, bravely, and flamboyantly, naturally takes the scarf for himself, not worrying about his own safety—and also *flaunting* the fact that he doesn't worry about his own safety—and then mockingly returns the scarf to de Guiche after the battle. Panache is a difficult way to live one's life, and most people—the Count included—can't handle it.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the G. W. Dillingham Company edition of *Cyrano de Bergerac* published in 1898.

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

RAGUENEAU:
He's prouder than all the fierce Artabans of whom Gascony
has ever been and will ever be the prolific Alma Mater! Above his Toby ruff
he carries a nose!--ah, good my lords, what a nose is his! When one sees it
one is fain to cry aloud, 'Nay! 'tis too much! He plays a joke on us!' Then
one laughs, says 'He will anon take it off.' But no!--Monsieur de Bergerac
always keeps it on.

Related Characters: Ragueneau (speaker), Cyrano de Bergerac

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Ragueneau, a popular tavern-keeper, explains a few things about his friend, Cyrano de Bergerac. Cyrano, we're told, is an intensely proud person. He also has an enormous nose--so enormous that it looks like a prop for a party.

Ragueneau establishes the two key facts about Cyrano: 1) he's proud, and 2) he's got a huge nose. As we'll see very soon, these two facts are really one and the same: in other words, Cyrano is proud *because* he was born with a large nose. Cyrano has always had to defend his honor from bullies and wisecrackers. Although his nose could be considered an embarrassing debility, Cyrano has learned to "wear" his nose with pride, defending his honor against anyone foolish enough to poke fun at him.

LIGNIERE (tasting his rivesalte in sips):
Magdalene Robin--Roxane, so called! A subtle wit--a precieuse.

CHRISTIAN:
Woe is me!

Related Characters: Baron Christian de Neuvillette, Ligniere (speaker), Magdalene Robin / Roxane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to the potential relationship between Christian and Roxane. Christian is a young, handsome man--so handsome that few women can resist his face. And yet Christian isn't very bright; specifically, he gets tongue-tied very easily. As a result, Christian is devastated when he finds out that Roxane, the young woman he loves, has a "subtle wit"--Christian hasn't got much wit at all.

The passage sets up the central problem of the play: the inability of either Christian *or* Cyrano to woo the beautiful Roxane. Cyrano has a big nose, and Christian has an awkward tongue; however, by "pooling their talent," Christian and Cyrano find a way to woo Roxane *together*, fooling her into believing that she's come across a man who is both brilliant and beautiful.

Act 1, Scene 4 Quotes

CYRANO:
'Tis enormous!
Old Flathead, empty-headed meddler, know
That I am proud possessing such appendice.
'Tis well known, a big nose is indicative
Of a soul affable, and kind, and courteous,
Liberal, brave, just like myself, and such
As you can never dare to dream yourself,
Rascal contemptible!

Related Characters: Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), The Bore

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Cyrano quarrels with a "Bore"--a stranger who foolishly makes fun of Cyrano for his nose. Cyrano responds by boasting of his nose: he claims that his nose is proof of his good character and brave heart.

Cyrano's response to the Bore is a strategy that should be familiar to anyone who's ever had to fight off a group of bullies. Instead of pushing back when the Bore points out his nose, Cyrano agrees that he has a big nose, but then

turns the tables to argue that his big nose is an asset, not a debility. In a way, Cyrano is right--over the course of a lifetime, he has trained himself to be brave and proud, in order to compensate for his ugly appearance. Furthermore, he is able to turn the mockery around on the Bore because of his "panache"--his carefully cultivated wit and flamboyance.

THE VISCOUNT:
Sir, your nose is. . . hmm. . . it is. . . very big!

CYRANO (gravely):
Very!

THE VISCOUNT (laughing):
Ha!

CYRANO (imperturbably):
Is that all?. . .

THE VISCOUNT:
What do you mean?

CYRANO:
Ah no! young blade! That was a trifle short!
You might have said at least a hundred things
By varying the tone.

Related Characters: Viscount de Valvert, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 50-51

Explanation and Analysis

In this famous scene, the Viscount de Valvert tries to insult Cyrano in the least creative way imaginable. Instead of thinking up an elaborate metaphor or pun about Cyrano's large nose, Valvert goes right for the throat, and calls the nose ... "very big." Cyrano responds with mock disgust, asking the Viscount why he didn't try for a more elaborate insult. (He then proceeds to list some of the cleverer ways the Viscount *could* have insulted him.)

Cyrano's behavior in this passage is a classic example of self-deprecating humor. Instead of fighting back against the Viscount's insult, Cyrano ingeniously takes the wind out of his enemy's sails, doing a far better job of insulting himself than the Viscount could ever manage. Although Cyrano is talented with the sword, his greatest asset is his mind, not his bravery. With words, Cyrano "wounds" the Viscount more deeply than sword ever could, implying that the Viscount is a fool who can barely string a sentence together.

CYRANO:
Paternal bounty, in a day, thou'rt sped!

LE BRET:
How live the next month?. . .

CYRANO:
I have nothing left.

Related Characters: Le Bret, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

At this early stage in the play, Cyrano is a young, popular man, who lavishes money on his friends and well-wishers. And yet as the scene draws to a close, it becomes clear that Cyrano isn't just generous with his money--he's actually reckless, to the point where he's often without the funds to pay for food or shelter. Cyrano's friend, Le Bret, asks Cyrano how he plans to live without any money, and Cyrano doesn't really have a good answer.

Cyrano's devil-may-care attitude toward spending money confirms that he's a born performer. Like any good actor, Cyrano knows how to lose himself in the moment: whether he's fighting a duel in front of a crowd of supporters or throwing away a bag of gold to prove a point (as he's just done), Cyrano doesn't think about the consequences of his actions. For now, Cyrano finds that he can live a cavalier, reckless lifestyle. By the time the play is over, though, Cyrano's combativeness and reckless spending will have caught up with him. The passage foreshadows the dark days ahead for Cyrano--soon enough, he truly will have nothing left.

Act 1, Scene 5 Quotes

LE BRET:
These fops, would-be belligerent,
Will, if you heed them only, turn your head!. . .
Ask people of good sense if you would know
The effect of your fine insolence--

CYRANO (finishing his macaroon):
Enormous!

LE BRET:
The Cardinal. . .

CYRANO (radiant):
The Cardinal--was there?

Related Characters: Cyrano de Bergerac, Le Bret (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Le Bret warns Cyrano that his quarrelsome attitude is making him more enemies than friends. Le Bret reminds Cyrano of his behavior the previous night, when he fought a duel in front of a large crowd of people. According to Le Bret, Cardinal Richelieu (in real life, the most powerful man in France at the time), was present for the duel--in other words, Cyrano might be alienating some powerful, influential people by defending his honor.

Le Bret's warning to Cyrano foreshadows the final act of the play, in which Cyrano's reckless behavior finally catches up to him. But for now, Cyrano rejects Le Bret's warnings. For Cyrano, the highest good is his own honor and fame--therefore, whenever anyone attacks his appearance, Cyrano *must* defend himself, either verbally or militarily, and he even takes delight in performing for powerful people (whether they might be offended or not).

Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

LISE:
Before you were the sworn comrade of all that crew, my friend, you did not
call your wife ant and Bacchante!

RAGUENEAU:
To turn fair verse to such a use!

LISE:
'Faith, 'tis all it's good for.

RAGUENEAU:
Pray then, madam, to what use would you degrade prose?

Related Characters: Ragueneau, Lise (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76-77

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ragueneau quarrels with his wife, Lise, about his practices as a store owner. Ragueneau has a soft spot for poetry and prose--as a result, he'll sometimes allow his literarily-minded customers to eat for free, provided that they can compose something for him in exchange.

Ragueneau's behavior is indicative of the Romantic ideal of the 19th century, when Rostand was writing his plays. Ragueneau is, above all, not a practical person--even if allowing people to eat for free is really bad business, Ragueneau values the world of ideas, feelings, and beautiful words more highly than the world of money. Much like Cyrano, Ragueneau is willing to live recklessly and romantically because of the strength of his ideals.

Act 2, Scene 4 Quotes

CYRANO (who has been watching, goes toward Ragueneau):
Lulled by your voice, did you see how they were stuffing themselves?

RAGUENEAU (in a low voice, smiling):
Oh, ay! I see well enough, but I never will seem to look, fearing to
distress them; thus I gain a double pleasure when I recite to them my poems;
for I leave those poor fellows who have not breakfasted free to eat, even
while I gratify my own dearest foible, see you?

CYRANO (clapping him on the shoulder):
Friend, I like you right well!. . .

Related Characters: Ragueneau, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86-87

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Cyrano and Ragueneau bond over their common interest in poetry and art. Ragueneau is a popular tavern owner, but he's not much of a businessman: he allows his patrons to eat for free if they'll listen to his poetry. Cyrano's reaction to Ragueneau's situation is intriguing. He suggests that Ragueneau's patrons are just taking advantage of him; i.e., they're not really interested in listening to some tavern owner's poetry, but just want the free food.

Cyrano's observations about Ragueneau are important because Ragueneau's situation parallels his own. Like Cyrano, Ragueneau's commitment to poetry and romantic ideals lead him to throw away substantive sums of money. Ironically, Cyrano is capable of noticing the flaws in Rageneau's behavior, but not his own. And at the end of the conversation, Cyrano confirms that he and Ragueneau really are guilty of the same tragic flaw: in spite of his objections, Cyrano admires anyone who savors poetry and performance, especially at the expense of worldly goods.

Act 2, Scene 6 Quotes

ROXANE:
Then you will be his friend?

CYRANO:
I swear!

ROXANE:
And he shall fight no duels, promise!

CYRANO:
None.

Related Characters: Magdalene Robin / Roxane, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Baron Christian de Neuvillette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

In this ironic passage, Roxane (the love of Cyrano's life) makes Cyrano swear to protect Christian at all times. Roxane has fallen in love with Christian from afar, and wants to make sure that Christian stays safe for her.

The passage is a good example of dramatic irony: this is a comedic scene, because we in the audience realize that Cyrano's oath to Roxane is agonizing for Cyrano, while Roxane herself has no idea of the truth. In spite of his internal agony, Cyrano bravely agrees to honor Roxane's wishes—a confirmation of Cyrano's vast, selfless love for Roxane, as well as his commitment to the Romantic values of honor and loyalty.

Act 2, Scene 8 Quotes

CYRANO:
Well, what if it be my vice,
My pleasure to displease--to love men hate me!
Ah, friend of mine, believe me, I march better
'Neath the cross-fire of glances inimical!
How droll the stains one sees on fine-laced doublets,
From gall of envy, or the poltroon's drivel!

Related Characters: Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Le Bret

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Cyrano and his friend Le Bret have a conversation about Cyrano's "vice"—his willingness to get into big fights, even if the source of the fight is a tiny, meaningless provocation. As we've already seen, Cyrano can't stand anyone making fun of his nose, or even talking about it. Cyrano seems perfectly aware that his habit of dueling with bullies is a little excessive, but he also refuses to change his behavior. Indeed, he claims that he feels better—more like himself, perhaps—when he's provoked his enemies.

Cyrano's claims here suggest that combativeness—or perhaps, "panache"—is his tragic flaw; the source of his greatness but also his weakness. Cyrano's desire to win every argument, to perform for a crowd, and to make a big show of correcting his opponents, are precisely what make him such a fascinating character. But these behaviors also lead to Cyrano's ultimate undoing (as we'll see later on). In short, Cyrano is a tragic, romantic hero, undone by the very qualities that make him who he is.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

ROXANE:
You would vex a saint!. . . But 'tis your jealousy.

CYRANO (starting):
What mean you?

ROXANE:
Ay, your poet's jealousy!

Related Characters: Magdalene Robin / Roxane, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Baron Christian de Neuvillette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Cyrano and Roxane (with whom Cyrano is secretly in love) talk about the mysterious letters that Roxane has been receiving from Christian. Roxane believes Christian to be the author of these letters—but of course, Cyrano knows the truth. He has been writing all of Christian's letters, perpetuating the illusion that Christian is the perfect lover for Roxane—brilliant as well as handsome.

In another fine example of dramatic irony, Roxane remains blissfully unaware that Cyrano is in love with her—when Cyrano bitterly derides the author of the letters, Roxane thinks he's jealous of Christian's poetic brilliance, not his romantic success.

Act 3, Scene 4 Quotes

CHRISTIAN:
And how know you I cannot speak?--
I am not such a fool when all is said!
I've by your lessons profited. You'll see
I shall know how to speak alone! The devil!
I know at least to clasp her in my arms!
(Seeing Roxane come out from Clomire's house):
--It is she! Cyrano, no!--Leave me not!

Related Characters: Baron Christian de Neuvillette (speaker), Cyrano de Bergerac, Magdalene Robin / Roxane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Christian shows how awkward and frightened he really is. For a while now, Christian has been sending letters to Roxane. Although the letters have been composed by Cyrano, Christian thinks he's getting the hang of wooing Roxane, and can manage on his own. Christian brags that he'll be able to get by without Cyrano's help—but as soon as he sees Roxane in person, he loses his nerve and begs Cyrano for help.

There's a strange symbiotic relationship between Christian and Cyrano in the play. Christian is utterly incapable of wooing Roxane on his own—he thinks he can do so, but can't. Cyrano is equally incapable of wooing his love, as his nose gets in the way (or so he assumes—it's important to note that he never actually *tries*). Rostand suggests the impossibilities of romance here. It's impossible to find the "perfect man" who can win Roxane; indeed, the only such "perfect man" in the play is a fiction, a combination of Christian's appearance and Cyrano's brain.

Act 3, Scene 6 Quotes

CYRANO:
Ay, it is sweet! Half hidden,--half revealed--
You see the dark folds of my shrouding cloak,
And I, the glimmering whiteness of your dress:
I but a shadow--you a radiance fair!
Know you what such a moment holds for me?
If ever I were eloquent. . .

ROXANE:
You were!

CYRANO:
Yet never till to-night my speech has sprung
Straight from my heart as now it springs.

Related Characters: Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Magdalene Robin / Roxane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Cyrano woos Roxane the only way he knows how—eloquently, but sightlessly. Speaking to Roxane as she stands at her balcony (a sly nod to the famous scene from *Romeo and Juliet*), Cyrano pretends to be Christian, and gives Roxane a beautiful speech, claiming that love is better when it is "half hidden." Although Roxane thinks that "Christian" is being romantic and poetic, Cyrano's words are quite literal—the only way he can successfully make Roxane fall in love is by standing far away from her, so that she's not aware of his ugly appearance.

The irony of Cyrano's speech is that he claims it's "straight" from his heart, when in reality the speech is a deception. Cyrano sincerely loves Roxane, and yet the only way he can express his love is by using deception, hiding his feelings behind Christian's handsome façade. In an imperfect, unfair world, some level of deception is the only way to conduct a love affair.

Act 3, Scene 11 Quotes

CYRANO (in a dreamy voice):
What's o'clock?

DE GUICHE:
He's lost his mind, for sure!

CYRANO:
What hour? What country this? What month? What day?

DE GUICHE:
But. . .

CYRANO:
I am stupefied!

DE GUICHE:
Sir!

CYRANO:
Like a bomb
I fell from the moon!

Related Characters: Count de Guiche, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

Here Cyrano tricks the Count de Guiche. Outside Roxane's house, Cyrano needs to delay de Guiche for long enough to allow Roxane the time to marry Christian inside. To provide an appropriate diversion, Cyrano conceals his face and pretends to be a madman who believes he's fallen from the moon. Cyrano's words aren't just random, however. They're laced with symbolism, since the moon is a famous symbol of romance—one could say that Cyrano is "falling from the moon" as he performs for de Guiche, since in doing so he's allowing Roxane to marry someone else, dashing his chances of ever ending up with her.

Cyrano's performance for de Guiche also demonstrates that Cyrano is capable of putting his talents to good use. We already knew that Cyrano was a theatrical, bombastic person, always willing to act for a willing audience. Here, though, we see Cyrano using his talents for the benefit of his friends, rather than for his own vanity.

Act 3, Scene 12 Quotes

ROXANE:
That he shall be faithful!

CYRANO:
Doubtless, but. . .

ROXANE:
That he will write oft?

CYRANO (pausing):
That, I promise you!

Related Characters: Magdalene Robin / Roxane, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Baron Christian de Neuvillette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Act 3, Cyrano and Christian are shipped off to war. Before they go, Roxane makes Cyrano promise her that he'll take care of Christian--to whom Roxane has just been married, much to Cyrano's chagrin. In spite of the fact that Cyrano now has no chance of marrying Roxane, and will have to love Roxane in vain for the rest of his life, he agrees to Roxane's requests, since he's already sworn an oath to protect Christian.

Cyrano's behavior reinforces his honorable character--while he has no practical reason for being loyal to Christian (it's not like protecting Christian is going to win him Roxane), he's a man of his word. At this point in the play, writing letters to Roxane is Cyrano's greatest pleasure--the only way that he can express his true feelings for her (even though he's forced to sign the letters with Christian's name).

Act 4, Scene 1 Quotes

LE BRET:
To think you risk a life so precious. . . for the sake of a letter. . .
Thankless one.
(Seeing him turning to enter the tent):
Where are you going?

CYRANO:
I am going to write another.

Related Characters: Le Bret, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Magdalene Robin / Roxane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we meet Cyrano on the battlefield. When he's not fighting, Cyrano spends all his time writing beautiful letters to Roxane, which he signs in Christian's name. As soon as Cyrano delivers one letter (risking his life to do so), he goes back to his tent to write another one.

The passage makes us wonder--why does Cyrano compose so many letters to Roxane, if he knows that none of his letters will ever make her fall in love with him (and will actually just make her love Christian more)? Cyrano is a true romantic--he doesn't dwell on the practicality or the long-term consequences of his actions. His love for Roxane is like an unquenchable thirst, and though his letters to Roxane don't make Roxane love him, they do bring him the joy of expressing his feelings.

Act 4, Scene 3 Quotes

CYRANO:
Ay, for homesickness. A nobler pain than hunger,--'tis of the soul, not of
the body! I am well pleased to see their pain change its viscera. Heart-ache
is better than stomach-ache.

Related Characters: Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Captain Carbon de Castel-Jaloux

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

Although the rest of the army is starving from lack of food, Cyrano seems perfectly content to eat nothing. He plays his troops a lovely song, which makes them remember their hometowns. As the troops cry and sigh, Cyrano points out that homesickness is a greater pain than hunger, and yet a better pain.

We already knew that Cyrano was a lofty idealist--he believes that poetry is more valuable than bread or money. But here on the battlefield, we see the full extent of Cyrano's Romanticism. Cyrano truly believes that ideas and emotions are more important to human life than food or shelter. Cyrano is perfectly willing to endanger his own life

in order to protect what he regards as truly important--love, poetry, etc. By the same token, Cyrano believes that one's home--i.e., a feeling of longing and love--is more valuable than food could ever be. Cyrano's beliefs are rather unrealistic, of course (you can't last long without food)--a sign that his way of life can't last forever--but for now they only add to his panache and popularity.

Act 4, Scene 4 Quotes

CYRANO (without lifting his eyes from his book):
And your white scarf?

DE GUICHE (surprised and gratified):
You know that detail?. . . Troth! It happened thus:
While caracoling to recall the troops
For the third charge, a band of fugitives
Bore me with them, close by the hostile ranks:
I was in peril—capture, sudden death!--
When I thought of the good expedient
To loosen and let fall the scarf which told
My military rank; thus I contrived
--Without attention waked--to leave the foes,
And suddenly returning, reinforced
With my own men, to scatter them! And now,
--What say you, Sir?

Related Characters: Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Count de Guiche

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 184-185

Explanation and Analysis

Cyrano's commander, Count de Guiche, is a cowardly man. In the midst of a battle, de Guiche wears a white scarf that makes it clear to everyone that he's a high-ranking officer. But when the battle gets ugly, de Guiche removes his scarf, afraid that it'll draw attention and make him a target for the enemy. Cyrano is clearly disgusted with de Guiche's combination of arrogance and cowardice--he doesn't even look up from his book as he interrogates his commander.

The white scarf is an important symbol in the play, because it connects to the idea of the white "plume" that is the literal meaning of the word "panache." Cyrano is defined by his panache, and it's later revealed in this same scene that he has risked his life precisely to retrieve de Guiche's scarf and embarrass his commander. Thus Rostand symbolically shows that de Guiche entirely lacks panache—he literally casts it aside when the going gets tough—while Cyrano is willing to risk death to maintain it.

Act 4, Scene 10 Quotes

CYRANO (in despair. to Roxane):
He's gone! 'Tis naught!--Oh, you know how he sees
Importance in a trifle!

ROXANE (warmly):
Did he doubt
Of what I said?--Ah, yes, I saw he doubted!

CYRANO (taking her hand):
But are you sure you told him all the truth?

ROXANE:
Yes, I would love him were he. . .

(She hesitates.)

CYRANO:
Does that word
Embarrass you before my face, Roxane?

Related Characters: Magdalene Robin / Roxane, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Baron Christian de Neuvillette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Cyrano comes extremely close to telling Roxane the truth about her love for Christian. Roxane has come to believe that she now loves Christian entirely for his soul, not his face. Cyrano, of course, is moved by this news--if Roxane is capable of loving Christian's soul, then she might be capable of loving Cyrano, in spite of his ugly face. Thus, Cyrano tries to make completely sure that Roxane loves "Christian's" (actually, Cyrano's) soul.

Even Roxane seem to sense the truth in this passage--the way she hesitates before using the word "ugly," clearly in response to the fact that Cyrano is ugly, suggests that she's really speaking about Cyrano himself, not Christian. It's as if Roxane can sense Cyrano's sincere love for her, despite the fact that previously Cyrano has had to "package" his love in Christian's body.

Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

ALL THE SISTERS:
He is so droll!--It's cheerful when he comes!--
He teases us!--But we all like him well!--
--We make him pasties of angelica!

SISTER MARTHA:
But, he is not a faithful Catholic!

Related Characters: Sister Claire, Sister Martha (speaker), Cyrano de Bergerac

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

In the final act of the play, Cyrano pays a visit to the nunnery where Roxane has been living ever since her husband's untimely death. The nuns note that Cyrano is a charming (and frequent) visitor to their home. Although he's not a particularly religious person, he's likable and funny, and respects the nuns deeply, even when he teases them.

The nuns' description of Cyrano confirms that Cyrano is just as lively and charming as ever, even though years have passed since we last saw him. Cyrano may not be the most conventionally "moral" person (he's arrogant and quick to fight) but he has an undeniable charm and sense of honor that makes us like and admire him. It's also worth noting that Cyrano's distaste for Catholicism (as per the nuns' description) places him at odds with the order of French society at the time. Catholicism, it's often said, is the branch of Christianity most concerned with order and obedience to a central authority (the Pope)--so it's entirely appropriate that Cyrano the "bad boy" would have his doubts about the faith.

Act 5, Scene 5 Quotes

ROXANE:
Ah!
Things dead, long dead, see! how they rise again!
--Why, why keep silence all these fourteen years,
When, on this letter, which he never wrote,
The tears were your tears?

CYRANO (holding out the letter to her):
The bloodstains were his.

Related Characters: Magdalene Robin / Roxane, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Baron Christian de Neuvillette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Roxane finally realizes the truth about her love for Christian. Cyrano, who's about to die, reads Roxane the letter that he wrote for her on the day Christian died. As Cyrano reads the letter, Roxane recognizes his voice as the voice of the man who seduced her years before. For the past nearly 15 years, Roxane realizes, she has been in love with a fictional creation: a man with Christian's body and Cyrano's mind.

Cyrano's behavior in this passage reinforces the strict moral code that guides his behavior at all times. Roxane asks Cyrano why Cyrano never came forward with the truth after Christian's death--in other words, why Cyrano never told Roxane that she was mourning a fictional creation. Cyrano explains that he didn't want to stomp on Christian's grave--he refused to ruin the illusion of Roxane's love for Christian.

Cyrano's self-control is remarkable. In spite of the fact that Roxane claimed she could love a man for his soul, not his face, and in spite of the fact that Roxane was no longer married to Christian, Cyrano never once tried to woo Roxane. In part, Cyrano refrained from seducing Roxane because he was too frightened (the only reason he's telling her the truth now is because he's about to die), but in part, Cyrano refrained from seducing Roxane out of respect for word and for his old friend--Cyrano swore an oath to Roxane to honor Christian, and he's obeyed that oath for nearly 15 years.

Act 5, Scene 6 Quotes

CYRANO:
That night when 'neath your window Christian spoke
--Under your balcony, you remember? Well!
There was the allegory of my whole life:
I, in the shadow, at the ladder's foot,
While others lightly mount to Love and Fame!
Just! very just!

Related Characters: Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker), Magdalene Robin / Roxane, Baron Christian de Neuvillette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

In the final pages of the play, Cyrano--who's dying--sums up his life. Cyrano has helped Christian woo Roxane by speaking and writing for Christian. Cyrano has, quite literally, been the "brains" of Christian's romance with Roxane. And yet Cyrano has always been denied the rewards of such a romance--he's never been able to express his love for Roxane directly, since at the end of the day, Christian is the handsome one.

Cyrano's complaints of "living in shadow" are both poignant and ironic. While it's true that Cyrano has been relegated to the sidelines during Christian's romance with Roxane, he certainly hasn't spent his "whole life" on the sidelines--on the contrary, he's been in full-view, performing for an audience of thousands. Cyrano is a born showman, who loves to entertain his many fans. Hence the contradiction of Cyrano's life: even though Cyrano is completely comfortable with himself, he's been forced to hide his true identity in the one arena where true identity really matters--love.

CYRANO:
Despite you there is yet one thing
I hold against you all, and when, to-night,
I enter Christ's fair courts, and, lowly bowed,
Sweep with doffed casque the heavens' threshold blue,
One thing is left, that, void of stain or smutch,
I bear away despite you.

ROXANE (bending and kissing his forehead):
'Tis?. . .

CYRANO (opening his eyes, recognizing her, and smiling):
My panache.

Related Characters: Magdalene Robin / Roxane, Cyrano de Bergerac (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 250

Explanation and Analysis

At the very end of the play, Cyrano dies--the victim of a mysterious attack. Over the years, Cyrano's arrogance and pride have made him many enemies--he's fought and won so many duels that everyone who doesn't love him despises him. Eventually, Cyrano's combative nature catches up to him, and he's killed as an act of revenge.

And yet Cyrano doesn't regret the life he's lived, despite the fact that he's "failed" in love (for all practical purposes) and his lifestyle has brought him to an untimely death. On the contrary, he glorifies his own panache--i.e., the pride, daring, and cavalier manner for which he's famous. Cyrano is, in other words, a true Romantic hero: although his inborn nature has brought him a lot of danger and sadness, he's always refused to live any other way. Cyrano is so confident in his ideals--the ideals of bravery, wit, and honor--that he's spent a lifetime defending them. Like any good Romantic hero, Cyrano dies young, but his reputation lives on after him: we, the audience members, continue to honor Cyrano's panache more than a hundred years after the play was written--as even the word "panache" was popularized by Rostand and his famous character.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The play begins in Paris, France, in the year 1640. The first act takes place in a hall of the luxurious Hotel de Bourgogne (not an actual hotel—more of a large meeting place or theater), and as Scene I begins, the hall is still dark. There are chairs arranged before an empty stage. As the scene goes on, people walk into the hall and sit down. Many of the people in the crowd are soldiers: troopers in the French army. One Trooper announces to the crowd that he's been admitted to the Hotel for free because he's a member of the King's Cavalry.

In the first scene of his play, Rostand paints a vivid picture of life in 17th century Paris: the period between the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment. During this time, social stratification was slowly beginning to wane—wealthy, powerful people rubbed shoulders with the poor to an extent that would have been inconceivable in earlier centuries. And yet the state military—an institution that, in France, dates back to the beginning of the Middle Ages—still dominated public life. In short, 17th century France was transitioning from military medievalism to an emphasis on learning, democracy, and equality.

The crowd is waiting for a play to be performed. To pass the time, the Troopers fence with their foils (fencing swords). At the same time, the Lackeys—servants of men with higher social status—play cards and dice. A Guardsman flirts with the Flower-Girl and tries to kiss her. The crowd discusses the play that is to be performed: it's been written by a playwright named Balthazar Baro. As people talk, a Pickpocket strolls around the room, snatching wallets and handkerchiefs from people.

Cyrano de Bergerac *is essentially a play about playing—that is, it's about the importance of acting, pretending, and "seeming," and how appearances affect identity. Rostand immediately signals this theme by beginning with a "play-within-a play," a dramatic device made most famous by Shakespeare's* Hamlet.

There is a commotion in the hall: three wealthy Marquises (noblemen) are going to enter the room. The First Marquis enters and greets his two friends, Baron de Cuigy and Baron de Brissaille.

In this first scene, Rostand conveys the "democratic chaos" of life in France at the time: the elites of society bump into the working classes, spurred on by an artistic event.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

The scene begins in the same hall of the Hotel, immediately following the events in Scene I. [NOTE: *Cyrano de Bergerac* is written in the traditional French style of the 18th and 19th centuries. All the scenes in an act of the play take place in the same setting. Furthermore, each scene immediately follows the preceding one, without any temporal breaks.) A poor, drunk man named Ligniere greets a group of young noblemen, including the First Marquis, the Baron de Cuigy, and the Baron de Brissaille. Ligniere introduces them to his friend, Baron Christian de Neuvillette, who seems distracted.

In a moment of comedy, an old, vulgar alcoholic bumps into a group of high-class noblemen. We're still not sure what this play is really "about" (the title character hasn't shown up yet), but the Baron Christian's distractedness in this scene suggests the first sign of a conflict in need of a resolution.

Christian pulls Ligniere aside. Christian has come to the Hotel to seek Ligniere's help. Christian wants Ligniere to identify a beautiful woman whom Christian saw some time ago. Christian is ecstatic about this mysterious woman—he thinks she's the love of his life. Ligniere, an alcoholic, is impatient, and wants to get out of the Hotel as soon as possible.

Rostand pushes aristocrats up against the working classes, forcing interesting interactions. One sign of Christian's likability is that he's friendly with Ligniere. Christian's egalitarian leanings make him seem more familiar to contemporary audiences—and even Rostand's original audiences were "contemporary," considering the play is set 200 years before its publication.

Suddenly, a short, fat man named Ragueneau enters the Hotel. Everyone cries out his name—Ragueneau is a beloved man and a famous tavern-keeper. Ragueneau approaches Ligniere and asks him if he's seen Monsieur de Cyrano. Ligniere says that he hasn't, but then he begins to praise Cyrano. He describes Cyrano as an excellent poet and fencer. Ragueneau mentions that Cyrano despises Montfluery (an actor), and has forbidden Montfluery to appear in the Hotel. As Ragueneau and Ligniere talk, the Marquises join in. They've heard rumors of Cyrano's talent and charisma, and Cuigy confirms that Cyrano is an impressive, talented gentleman.

It's appropriate that news of Cyrano's reputation appears in the play before Cyrano himself does: Cyrano's reputation precedes him wherever he goes, and he is even (as we will see) defined *by his reputation. Interestingly, this is one of the only sections in the entire play in which it's explicitly stated that Cyrano is a nobleman. Rostand doesn't overemphasize this fact: Cyrano's appeal to audiences is that he's comfortable among both the nobility and the working class—he's a modern man living in the 17th century.*

Cuigy calls to a man in the crowd, whom he introduces to the other Marquises as Le Bret. Cuigy explains that Le Bret is a friend of Cyrano. Le Bret explains to the Marquises that Cyrano is a poet, a soldier, a philosopher, and a musician. And yet, Ragueneau joins in, Cyrano has one strange quality: his **nose**. Cyrano's nose is enormous—so big that when people meet him for the first time, they assume the nose is a prop for a costume. Whenever anyone makes fun of Cyrano's nose, Cyrano challenges the man to a duel, and Cyrano always wins.

In this important expository section, we get a slightly different sense of Cyrano's personality. Cyrano is talented and charismatic, but he's also argumentative and combative, no doubt because he's spent most of his life being teased for his enormous nose. One gets the sense that Cyrano has always had *to compensate for his appearance by developing other skills.*

Suddenly, a young, beautiful woman enters the Hotel and sits down near the stage. The Marquises notice her enter the room and comment on her beauty. Christian sees the woman and exclaims that this is the woman he'd noticed before. Ligniere explains that the woman's name is Magdalene Robin, or Roxane, a cousin of Cyrano.

By this point, we've gotten a good sense for which characters are going to be important to the play: Christian and Roxane are clearly protagonists. Notably, Christian hasn't even spoken to Roxane yet—his love for her is founded on her physical beauty, not her mind or her spirit. This may seem rather shallow and sexist (and it is), but it wasn't at all uncommon in European literature, either in the 17th or the 19th century.

Christian and Ligniere watch as a young, handsome nobleman goes to speak to Roxane. Ligniere—who's quickly becoming very drunk—explains that the man is the Count de Guiche. Although the Count is clearly attracted to Roxane, he is already engaged to another woman. As a result, the Count has a plan to marry Roxane to a loyal friend of his, the Viscount Valvert. Christian, growing impatient with Ligniere, gets up to leave. Ligniere cries out and points to Roxane—she is looking straight at Christian. Christian seems exhilarated. The audience cries out for the play to begin.

The scene ends with some more important exposition. By now Rostand has introduced the major characters of the play, and has also given us a good sense of the conflict: de Guiche and Christian are competing for the same woman, Roxane. Appropriately enough, the scene ends with the play-within-the-play beginning. This is a clever device on Rostand's part—now that we know who the characters in Cyrano *are, the play can really "begin."*

ACT 1, SCENE 3

As the play is about to begin in the Hotel, Count de Guiche goes to speak with the Marquises. De Guiche invites the Marquises to climb onto the stage with him. Christian, watching all this, reaches into his pocket for his gloves, and realizes that the Pickpocket is stealing from him. The Pickpocket smiles calmly and gives Christian some news: there is a group of men sent to attack Ligniere that night. Ligniere has written a bawdy song that offended people in "high places," the Pickpocket explains. The men—sent by someone whom the Pickpocket refuses to name—are stationed at every pub and tavern in town. Christian is reluctant to leave Roxane, but out of loyalty to Ligniere he rushes out of the Hotel to find his friend.

The fact that Christian spares the Pickpocket could be a sign of Christian's generosity, his democratic leanings, or just his love for Roxane, which distracts him from everything else. Indeed, this brief scene helps us sort out these different aspects of Christian's personality. Although he's enamored with Roxane, he's also a loyal friend who doesn't turn up his nose at the lower classes. Thus, he gives up the pleasure of staring at Roxane and goes off to protect his friend Ligniere.

The audience shouts out for the play to begin. Then, unexpectedly, a silence falls over the room. Le Bret turns to a spectator to ask why everyone is so quiet. The spectator explains that a Cardinal has come to see the play—everyone will have to be on his best behavior around such an important religious figure.

The Cardinal (a senior leader in the Catholic Church) in this scene is probably Cardinal Richelieu, at the time the most powerful man in France. This is another reminder of the vast changes in French society at the time: the elite were mixing with the commoners in public.

The play begins, with the Marquises and the Count de Guiche sitting on the stage, watching. As the music plays, Le Bret whispers to Ragueneau that Cyrano has not come to the hotel that night. On the stage, the actor Montfluery walks in front of the audience wearing a gaudy dress—the audience laughs and applauds. Suddenly, a voice shouts out from the audience, reminding Montfluery, "Did I not forbid you to show your face here for a month?" The spectators turn, and Le Bret whispers, "Cyrano!"

Cyrano's entrance into his own play is unforgettable—he literally usurps the performance of a rival performer, Montfluery, and inserts himself as the star. We already knew that Cyrano was a talented speaker and dueler, but now we see that he's also a master showman, always performing for an audience, the bigger the better.

Cyrano de Bergerac emerges from the crowd and climbs onto the stage. He has a splendid mustache and an enormous **nose**.

The scene ends with something like a "punch-line"—this impressive, intimidating man is also somewhat ridiculous-looking.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Cyrano stands on the stage, confronting Montfluery, whom he's forbidden from appearing in the Hotel for a month. Cyrano threatens to cut off Montfluery's ears with a sword if Montfluery doesn't leave immediately. The audience grumbles that Cyrano is ruining the play, but Cyrano threatens to turn his sword on the spectators if they continue yelling.

Cyrano's introduction reveals many important parts of his character, which is defined by the concept of "panache": a flamboyant, showy kind of flair. Cyrano loves art above all else, and considers bad acting a "crime." He also likes to perform for a crowd and show off his wit, flair, and even his swordsmanship. It's clear that he planned this dramatic entrance beforehand.

Cyrano draws his sword and says he'll give Montfluery until the count of three to get out of the theater. The audience finds this amusing, and begins laughing and cheering. On three, Montfluery races away, and the audience claps.

Cyrano isn't just canceling the show—he's putting on a new show to replace it. The audience begins to realize this, and claps and cheers for Cyrano, who apparently is a well-known figure.

A young man in the audience asks Cyrano, who climbs off the stage back into the crowd, why he hates Montfluery so much. Cyrano explains that he has two reasons. The first is that Montfluery is a terrible actor, and the second reason, he says, is his secret. An old man in the crowd says that Cyrano has deprived an audience of entertainment, but Cyrano replies that Baro's play can hardly be called entertainment. A Hotel worker, Bellerose, calls out that Cyrano has deprived the Hotel of money, since all the theatergoers will have to be refunded their tickets. Cyrano produces a purse of gold and throws it to Bellerose. Impressed, Bellerose says that Cyrano has paid enough to interrupt the play every night.

Cyrano's "performance" in this scene tells us a lot about his character. He's both a nobleman and a commoner, a snob and a democrat. He's fairly wealthy, given that he has a purse of gold on his person, but he seems to not mind sharing his wealth with a group of strangers in order to make a reckless show of generosity. In addition, Cyrano snobbishly cancels the performance because of one bad actor, and yet he also has a bawdy, slapstick sense of humor of his won. Above all, Cyrano is a performer. Even his generosity shows his actor's instinct: he gives up his money to impress his fans.

A "Bore" of a theatergoer asks Cyrano if Cyrano has a patron (someone who supports him financially). Cyrano replies that he has no patron, other than his own sword. The Bore protests that Cyrano, who has offended the Duke of the town with his actions, will have to leave immediately. Cyrano replies that he's more than a match for the Duke.

Cyrano is a man of contradictions. He's clearly born into the upper class, but he has no respect for other elites in Paris. He's in an "in-between" state, and this makes him exotic, especially in 17th century French society, where everyone's social role is supposed to be clearly and rigidly delineated.

As Cyrano talks, the Bore can't help but stare at his enormous **nose**. Cyrano asks the Bore what he's staring at, and the Bore, eyeing Cyrano's sword, is reluctant to answer. Cyrano asks the Bore if his nose is long like an elephant's trunk, or if there's a fly on it. The Bore whispers that Cyrano's nose is tiny, and Cyrano replies that the Bore is being absurd. He says he's proud of having a large nose, since a big nose symbolizes having a good soul. He yells to the Bore and the rest of the audience that anyone who mocks his nose will be forced to duel with him.

So far, Cyrano has been using only his reputation as a swordsman as a weapon, but here we see that he's equally adept at using language as a weapon. Without ever drawing his sword, he "attacks" the Bore, and even more surprisingly, he attacks the Bore by insulting his own nose. Cyrano's nose is a complicated symbol in the play—Cyrano is insecure about it, and duels anyone who insults it, but he also takes a certain pride in his nose, flaunting its ugliness and using it as a point of contention to purposefully show off his wit and fighting prowess.

Cyrano walks through the Hotel hall. The Viscount Valvert, amused by the spectacle, goes up to Cyrano and tells him he has a big **nose**. Cyrano asks Viscount if that's the best insult he could think of. He lists dozens of insults the Viscount could have used—the Viscount could have compared the nose to a pipe, a chimney, a seashell, a pumpkin, etc. The crowd laughs and cheers for Cyrano as he rattles off insults, and the Viscount becomes enraged.

As in the previous scene, Cyrano wittily attacks his opponent by seemingly attacking himself. The message of his monologue is that the Bore isn't doing his job: "If you're going to insult me, at least insult me right." Much of the pleasure of Rostand's play comes from the witty wordplay and monologues in scenes like this one.

Valvert glares at Cyrano, and draws his sword. Cyrano does the same: they must duel now. The Viscount hisses that Cyrano is only a poet, not a fighter. Cyrano laughs and says that to prove that he is a poet, he will compose a ballade (a form of poem) while dueling with the Viscount. The crowd circles around the duelers in a hushed silence, eager to hear Cyrano's rhymes.

Cyrano embodies the Romantic ideal of the 19th century: he's both physically and mentally impressive, and thus can fight a duel while composing a poem. It's important to keep in mind that this is all happening in front of a big crowd: Cyrano wants others to watch as he humiliates his opponent, because performing gives him genuine pleasure.

The duel begins. Valvert fights aggressively, but Cyrano parries his attacks easily. As the Viscount grows more and more frustrated, Cyrano composes a poem in which he compares his opponent to a wriggling eel. After exactly three stanzas of poetry (the length of the "ballade" form), Cyrano strikes the Viscount, winning the duel. The crowd cheers.

In this famous scene, Cyrano shows off his mastery of both words and swords. It's as if he's already predicted how the scene will go, right down to the number of stanzas it will take for him to defeat his opponent, as the duel ends just as he completes the "ballade."

Cyrano sheaths his sword and goes to greet his friend Le Bret. The Marquises approach Cyrano and praise him for his bravery and intelligence. Cyrano thanks them, and then confesses something to Le Bret: he has no money. The purse of gold, he explains, was "paternal bounty." Le Bret insists that Cyrano should have saved the money, but Cyrano claims that the gesture of giving away so much money in one second is worth being unable to eat for a month. Suddenly, a Buffet-Girl approaches Cyrano. She tells him that he may eat as much as he likes of the buffet in the Hotel. Cyrano graciously accepts, and kisses the Buffet-Girl's hand. However, he doesn't eat very much food—only a single grape.

The scene ends with a surprising twist: Cyrano, the dashing gentleman, is actually broke. This is an important piece of information, because it makes his act of generosity (throwing the bag of gold into the crowd) seem both more impressive and more reckless. Cyrano doesn't always think about the material consequences of his actions—like any good actor, he "loses himself in the moment," performing for a crowd and forgetting about what comes next. For the time being, however, Cyrano doesn't have to suffer for his recklessness, as his charisma is its own force of currency, enabling him to eat for free. And yet Cyrano doesn't eat much even here—he puts his pride before his health, foreshadowing the events of Act 5.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

Cyrano and Le Bret sit down to eat, Cyrano having just accepted free food from a kind Buffet-Girl. Le Bret warns Cyrano that he's making enemies in town by interrupting theater performances—he reminds Cyrano that "the Cardinal" (Cardinal Richelieu, the most powerful man in France) was in the audience that night, not to mention de Guiche and Valvert.

In a clear instance of foreshadowing, Le Bret suggests that Cyrano's actions have consequences: at the rate Cyrano's going, he'll have angered everyone in town within a few years. Cyrano ignores these warnings, in part because he's naturally reckless and partly because he has faith in his own charisma. Cyrano thinks that by wowing a crowd, he can remain popular, well liked, and successful. He thinks that impressing an audience of commoners is more important than pandering to a group of dull aristocrats—and indeed, this is partly what makes Cyrano stand out so much among his peers.

Le Bret demands to know why Cyrano despises Montfluery so much. Cyrano explains that Montfluery has been ogling a woman for whom Cyrano himself has feelings. This woman, Cyrano goes on, is the most beautiful he's ever known: his own cousin, Roxane. Le Bret tells Cyrano that he should tell Roxane how he feels, but Cyrano dismisses this idea, saying that his ugly **nose** will prevent him from ever getting a beautiful woman to love him. Having a big nose is a lonely way to live, Cyrano explains sadly. Le Bret disagrees—surely Cyrano's wit and humor could help him win over beautiful women.

Here, we learn a secret about Cyrano, something that is clearly too private and important to him for him to exhibit it in his performances: he's in love with his cousin Roxane (love between cousins would not have been taboo at the time). In a way, Cyrano's verbal and physical performances are disguises: by pretending to be combative and aggressive, he conceals the fact that he's secretly tender, and a romantic at heart. Cyrano's nose is a symbol of outward ugliness concealing a "beautiful" interior, but here we also see that it may be more of an obstacle for Cyrano himself than for others—he doesn't even try to court Roxane because he assumes that she would be repulsed by his nose. Once we actually meet Roxane, however, it's suggested that this may be a mistake, and Cyrano's insecurities may be robbing him of happiness.

As Le Bret and Cyrano talk, a Duenna (a serving woman) approaches them and tells Cyrano that she has come from Roxane to deliver a message.

Right on cue, we learn that Roxane has a message for Cyrano. We can't help but wonder if Roxane share's her cousin's feelings.

ACT 1, SCENE 6

The Duenna tells Cyrano that Roxane has sent her to summon Cyrano to Roxane's chambers tomorrow after she's come back from church. Cyrano, visibly excited by this news, tells the Duenna to tell Roxane to meet him at the pastry shop belonging to Ragueneau. The Duenna nods and leaves.

Clearly Cyrano thinks there's a good chance that Roxane loves him back—his excited demeanor is just the opposite of his droll affect during his duel with Valvert. For once he's not putting on a show, and can't conceal his real emotions and vulnerabilities.

ACT 1, SCENE 7

Cyrano has just gotten word that he's to meet with Roxane, his cousin and love, tomorrow morning. Suddenly, a group enters the Hotel hall: Cuigy, Brissaille, and Ligniere, who's very drunk. Cyrano recognizes Ligniere, and asks what has happened. Ligniere, who can barely speak, produces a letter, and explains that the letter warns that Ligniere will be attacked by a hundred men that night. Ligniere begs to stay at Cyrano's home for a night to avoid being attacked. Cyrano, emboldened by the news of Roxane, agrees to shelter Ligniere for the night, and boasts that he could take on the hundred men with ease.

Cyrano can be sarcastic and snarky with Ligniere, but he's so overjoyed to be meeting with Roxane tomorrow that he feels invincible, and decides to help Ligniere defend himself from a multitude of enemies. There's something heavily chivalric and medieval about Cyrano's behavior in this scene: the love of a beautiful woman acts as a kind of tonic, compelling Cyrano to fight harder and be braver in battle.

Cyrano marches Ligniere out of the Hotel, prepared to fight any opponent. As he walks into the night, followed by a group of eager observers, he takes in the view of Paris: the Seine (the primary river of Paris) and the dark, shadowy houses.

The first act of the play ends on a note of suspense: Cyrano is about to fight a great battle on Ligniere's behalf, and he's also looking forward to his meeting with Roxane. The two events are connected, of course, as Cyrano's anticipation of Roxane's love has inspired him to fight.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

The second act (still set in Paris in the year 1640) takes place in Ragueneau's pastry shop, where Cyrano has agreed to meet the love of his life, his cousin Roxane. Inside the shop, there are dead birds hanging from the roof, to be plucked and cooked later on.

Rostand describes Ragueneau's shop in rich detail. For all his satire of the French aristocracy of the time, he delights in conveying the places of 17th century France—here, the kinds of small shops that were disappearing during Rostand's lifetime.

Ragueneau walks through his shop, eager to start his day. His cooks are preparing nougat, custard, and roast peacock, along with other delicacies. As Ragueneau shouts out directions, his wife, Lise, enters the room. Lise complains that Ragueneau is a bad businessman: he lets some of his literary-minded patrons pay for their food by writing verses for him. Ragueneau defends his choice and urges Lisa to respect poets.

Ragueneau establishes an important theme of the novel: the tradeoff between practicality and idealism, symbolized by the tradeoff between food and poetry. Much like Cyrano, Ragueneau believes that he can survive on poetry instead of food and money. This appears noble and beautiful, but is also obviously false—as with Cyrano's performances of generosity and reckless daring, Ragueneau's philosophy can only last so long before it bumps up against reality.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Two children walk into Ragueneau's pastry shop, asking for pies. Ragueneau prepares the pies but finds he has nothing in which to wrap them. Reluctantly, he takes some of the verses Lise has just shown him, and chooses a love sonnet "to Phillis" to wrap the pies. The children accept their food. As they're about to leave the shop, Ragueneau whispers to them to give him back the sonnet, and the children do so. He reads the sonnet to himself, whispering the name, "Phillis."

Ragueneau is a typical comic character—he's exaggeratedly afraid of his own wife, reversing the stereotypical family structure of the strong husband and the meek, loving wife. Now more than ever, it's clear that Ragueneau, like Cyrano, favors poetry and art over dollars and cents.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Cyrano de Bergerac enters Ragueneau's pastry shop, and tells Ragueneau that he has one hour to wait. Ragueneau greets Cyrano and compliments him on his impressive actions the previous night. (It's not specified what Ragueneau's talking about.) Lise, who's strolling in and out of the shop as she works, greets Cyrano and asks him what's wrong with his hand—Cyrano says that he cut it, but doesn't elaborate.

Instead of coming right out and saying that Cyrano fought an enormous battle against many foes, Rostand draws out the comedy, slowly giving hints as to what Cyrano has done. The fact that Cyrano was able to defeat so many opponents with no more than a small hand injury is a testament to his bravery, as well as just how inspired he was by Roxane's attention.

Cyrano sits in the shop. To pass the time, he decides to write love verses to Roxane. He produces a pen and goes to work as Ragueneau and Lise go about their mornings.

Cyrano breathes poetry—he passes the time by channeling his feelings for Roxane into verse. To Cyrano, writing about Roxane is as natural as thinking about her, and indeed, the two processes are almost one and the same for him. In contrast to his insecurities about his physical appearance, he can best express himself through the verbal "appearances" of verse and wit.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Cyrano sits, writing a love-letter in verse for Roxane. As he writes, a group of poets, dressed in black, enters the shop. The poets greet Ragueneau warmly, and Ragueneau notes that he always feels comfortable with poets right away. As Cyrano writes, the poets comment that they've recently witnessed a spectacular fight. A single man fought off an enormous mob using only his sword. None of the poets know who the man was.

As seems only natural, Cyrano and Ragueneau get along well because they see art and poetry in the same way: as the most valuable and noble aspects of humanity. Rostand still doesn't confirm that Cyrano was the one who fought the large battle last night, but the fact that his hand is cut suggests as much. This creates strong dramatic irony, as the poets don't know who fought the men, but we do.

Ragueneau shows the poets something he's been working on: a recipe in verse. He explains how to make almond tartlets, and the poets applaud his elegant rhymes. As they listen, the poets eat Ragueneau's pastries and tarts—when Ragueneau is finished, they sit down. Cyrano asks Ragueneau how he can give the poets so much free food. Ragueneau replies that he is happy to support young artists—he genuinely enjoys doing so. Cyrano tells Ragueneau that he admires this attitude.

Interestingly, Ragueneau unites art and food with his poetry about making tarts. This is a symbolic way for Rostand to suggest that, at least for the time being, Ragueneau's love for art isn't costing him money: he can have both poetry and food. The same is true for Cyrano: for the time being, Cyrano can both be wealthy and be extravagant. Naturally, this state can't last forever for either man.

Cyrano and Ragueneau notice that Lise is speaking "tenderly" to a shop patron, a young Musketeer. Cyrano points this out to Lise, and Lise replies that no man can "conquer her," a claim that Cyrano finds questionable. Cyrano warns Lise not to make Ragueneau a "laughingstock."

Cyrano is fiercely loyal to his friends. It's very telling to consider the way in which Cyrano expresses his warning to Lise: rather than warning Lise not to flirt, he warns Lise not to make other people laugh at Ragueneau. Cyrano is more concerned with other people's perception than with reality.

Ragueneau motions for the poets to follow him into a separate room, where they can read and discuss more verse. The poets get up from their table and follow him to the room, scooping up a few more cakes on the way.

The scene ends with a tragicomic reminder that Ragueneau's prosperity can't last forever: there's something self-negating about his form of generosity, and others can easily take advantage of him (even if they don't mean to).

ACT 2, SCENE 5

Cyrano sits in the shop. Suddenly, Roxane walks in, wearing a mask and accompanied by the Duenna. Cyrano greets the Duenna and offers her some cakes and pastries (Ragueneau isn't present to protest). Cyrano invites the Duenna to eat the cakes outside, and then pushes her out the door. He is now alone with Roxane in the shop.

Cyrano smoothly gets the Duenna out the door by giving her cakes (even Cyrano isn't above stealing from his good friend). The scene is now set perfectly: Roxane is all alone with Cyrano, ready to tell him her secret.

ACT 2, SCENE 6

Cyrano greets Roxane, who takes off her mask. Roxane tells Cyrano that she has come to meet him in order to think him for dueling with Valvert. She explains that the Viscount wanted to marry her—she and Cyrano laugh together about this.

Rostand increases the suspense here, as Roxane doesn't come right out and says what's on her mind. We sense that both she and Cyrano are nervous about what happens next.

Roxane tells Cyrano that she needs a confidant. She begs Cyrano to once again be the friend who'd play with her as a child. Cyrano nods and agrees. Roxane notices the cut on Cyrano's hand, but Cyrano brushes it off as a minor scrape. Abruptly changing topic, Roxane tells Cyrano that she is in love with someone who doesn't know it. Cyrano becomes excited as Roxane tells him this—all he can say is "Ah!" Then, Roxane reveals that this man is Baron Christian de Neuvillette. Just as Roxane tells Cyrano this, the Duenna walks back into the shop, having eaten all the cakes.

We now realize that Roxane and Cyrano have known each other since they were small children. Unlike Christian, who sees Roxane from across the room and falls for her instantly, Cyrano knows and loves every aspect of Roxane's mind, spirit, and personality—as well as her past. Just when we're sure that Cyrano is the perfect match for Roxane, Rostand introduces a major twist in the plot: Roxane loves Christian instead. (Modern readers are so used to this kind of plot twist in romantic comedies, however, that it probably doesn't register as a "twist" at all.)

Cyrano asks Roxane what she sees in Christian. She explains that he is very handsome, but Cyrano points out that anyone can be handsome, even if they're a fool. Nevertheless, Cyrano tells Roxane that he'll befriend Christian and determine if he loves Roxane. Roxane is overjoyed to hear this. She also convinces Cyrano to ensure that Christian, a cadet soldier, doesn't get into any duels. Roxane thanks Cyrano again and again for being a good friend to her. With this, she and the Duenna exit, leaving Cyrano alone.

The dominant kind of humor in the first half of the play is dramatic irony—that is, we know that Cyrano loves Roxane, but Roxane doesn't know this. Here, it's so obvious to us that Cyrano is trying to discourage Roxane from loving Christian, but Roxane doesn't follow at all. Depressingly, Cyrano must now be loyal to his own rival, Christian, because he's promised Roxane as much.

ACT 2, SCENE 7

As Cyrano sits alone in the shop, contemplating what Roxane has just told him, Ragueneau and the poets walk in. Ragueneau is about to ask Cyrano how his meeting with Roxane went when a huge crowd, including the Gascon cadets with whom Cyrano serves, rushes into the pastry shop. The men in the crowd compliment Cyrano for his bravery the previous night. (For now, they don't specify what act of bravery they're referring to.) A reporter asks Cyrano to describe what happened so that the story can be related in the town newspaper. Cyrano, still upset over the news about Roxane, seems distant and aloof.

The irony of this scene is clear: Cyrano only fought his impressive battle the night before because Roxane's supposed love inspired him. Now that it's over, however, he couldn't care less about his victory, since it's clear to him that Roxane doesn't love him no matter his feats of bravery. We also get a better sense for Cyrano's military life: he's well liked and respected by his fellow soldiers, who are mostly from the province of Gascon (see Background Info for more).

The Count de Guiche enters the room. De Guiche says that he's gotten word that Cyrano performed a feat of great valor the previous night. Cyrano stands and addresses the Count as "my lord." In rhyming verse, he presents his fellow Gascon cadets to the Count. De Guiche is impressed with Cyrano's obvious intelligence, and offers to put in a good word for Cyrano with Cardinal Richelieu, de Guiche's powerful uncle. Cyrano is tempted by this offer. He has a play he's been trying to get staged for many years—as Le Bret reminds him, Richelieu's favor could help the play succeed. Then de Guiche mentions that his uncle might correct or change a line or two, and Cyrano's face stiffens immediately. A young cadet enters the room, carrying a pile of hats, which he claims belonged to a group of fugitives. Cyrano takes the hats and throws them on the floor in front of de Guiche.

It's fair to say that both de Guiche and Cyrano are at fault in this scene. De Guiche is conceited and acts haughtily superior to the Gascon cadets, but Cyrano is also overly rude to de Guiche because he is upset about Roxane. It's telling that Cyrano becomes angry when de Guiche suggests that Cyrano should allow his words to be censored somewhat. Rostand, writing at the end of the 19th century, respects the importance of free speech, and laughs at the rigid religious censorship common in France in the 1600s. This reinforces the idea that Cyrano is a "modern man"—open-minded, freethinking, etc.—living 250 years before his time.

De Guiche is shocked by Cyrano's abruptly confrontational behavior. He asks Cyrano if he's ever read *Don Quixote*, and Cyrano says he has. De Guiche warns Cyrano not to joust with windmills, lest he end up being thrown to the ground. Cyrano replies that a windmill could just as easily throw him up to the stars. Furious, de Guiche gathers his followers and leaves the shop.

De Guiche seems like an appropriate opponent for Cyrano, and here the two enemies "joust" with words. Cyrano, using his superior knowledge and wit, clearly wins the exchange. It's interesting to compare Cyrano de Bergerac with Don Quixote: like the famous character from Cervantes' novel, Cyrano is simultaneously humorous and noble, highbrow and lowbrow, argumentative and peaceful. This reminds us that Rostand's play, for all its comic touches, is really a tragicomedy with serious undertones.

ACT 2, SCENE 8

Cyrano sits in the pastry shop with his cadets, Ragueneau, and Lise. The cadets ask Cyrano why he's been picking fights with so many powerful people—first the Viscount Valvert, and now the Count de Guiche himself. Cyrano replies that he's always delighted in displeasing people. Hatred is a powerful force—by embracing hatred, Cyrano makes himself strong and invincible. Le Bret, who's been listening closely to Cyrano and watching his behavior, whispers, "She loves thee not."

Cyrano's explanation for why he picks fights with his social superiors isn't exactly truthful, and Le Bret recognizes this right away—he knows that Cyrano is just depressed about being unloved by Roxane. In truth, Cyrano usually picks fights with his superiors because he's proud, dignified, and enjoys showing off. He also refuses to give into the bogeymen of 17th century society: censorship, excessive piety, close-mindedness, etc.

Christian enters the pastry shop. Although he is a cadet, his peers don't speak to him, and he sits alone at a table.

This is the first test of Cyrano's loyalty and honor: will he take out his anger on the hapless Christian, or will he remember his promise to Roxane?

ACT 2, SCENE 9

In the pastry shop, the cadets call for Cyrano to tell the story of his violent clash with the soldiers the previous night. Cyrano says he'll tell the story in due time.

Cyrano clearly isn't himself: it's not like him to turn down the opportunity to tell a story, particularly one that highlights his own bravery and prowess.

A cadet walks by Christian's table and calls Christian a weak, inexperienced boy. He also warns Christian never to say the word "**nose**" in front of Cyrano. Another cadet chimes in, explaining that in the past Cyrano has killed men because they brought up his enormous nose.

The cadets are teasing Christian, but it's also impossible to tell how much: we've seen Cyrano fight (non-lethal) duels because of an insult about his nose, but to actually kill someone over such an insult seems excessive.

Christian walks to his Captain, Carbon de Castel-Jaloux. He asks Carbon what a Northerner (which Christian is) can do to prove himself to a group of Southern Frenchmen (the cadets in the shop). Carbon tells Christian that he must demonstrate his bravery in some way.

At this point in French history, France wasn't a strong, consolidated nation-state—it was a loose confederation of provinces, each with its own culture. Christian, a Northerner among Gascons (Southern Frenchmen), naturally wants to prove himself so that he isn't treated like such an outsider.

Cyrano begins to tell the cadets the story of his conflict with the soldiers the previous night. The night was very dark, he begins. Christian interrupts Cyrano, saying the night was so dark that Cyrano must have been able to see his **nose** and nothing else. The cadets are dumbfounded by Christian's insult. Cyrano, furious, asks a cadet for Christian's name. Remembering his promise to Roxane, however, Cyrano forces himself to be calm, and goes on. He explains how he ventured outside of the city, where he found "a hundred brawling sots." Christian interjects with puns and jokes about Cyrano's nose, and each time he does so Cyrano moves on with his story, barely concealing his fury. Finally, in the midst of the story, Christian makes a nose joke, and Cyrano bellows, "Out! All of you!" The cadets, Carbon, and Ragueneau, sure that Cyrano is going to murder Christian, flee the room instantly.

In this hilarious scene, Christian tries to show his bravery by insulting Cyrano, and Cyrano—much to everyone's amazement—doesn't do anything about it, since he's sworn to Roxane that he'll look out for Christian's safety. Rostand cleverly exploits the dramatic irony of this situation: we know that Christian has nothing to fear (whatever he says, Cyrano won't attack him), but neither Christian nor the other cadets are aware of this. At the same time we get to witness Cyrano's inner struggle, as his pride and reputation does battle with his loyalty and honor—and loyalty wins out.

ACT 2, SCENE 10

The pastry shop is empty except for Cyrano and Christian. Cyrano turns to Christian, who has been making fun of his **nose** in order to prove his bravery to his peers. Cyrano compliments Christian for his bravery and introduces himself as Roxane's brother, immediately correcting himself and saying "cousin." Christian is excited by this news. He asks Cyrano if Roxane loves him, and Cyrano replies, "maybe."

Cyrano is still organizing his thoughts, figuring out how to lie convincingly to Christian without betraying his own love for Roxane—thus, he changes his story almost right away, pretending to be Roxane's brother, before truthfully admitting that he's her cousin. This isn't at all like Cyrano—usually he's prepared his "story" perfectly.

Cyrano explains that Roxane wants Christian to send her a letter. Christian finds this intimidating—while he's handsome, he's extremely bad at eloquent speaking and writing, he explains. Cyrano admits that he has the opposite problem: he's eloquent, but his **nose** makes him unpopular with women.

At first, we'd assumed that Christian and Cyrano would be rivals for Roxane's love. But now it seems that they need each other: Christian needs Cyrano's eloquence, and Cyrano would kill for Christian's beauty. Only by working together can either one of them hope to have a chance with Roxane (or so they assume, at least—neither considers just being honest with her about their feelings).

Cyrano then has an idea. Together, he *and* Christian will woo Roxane. Christian will be the "face," and Cyrano will be the "voice." Cyrano produces the beautiful letter he'd written for Roxane earlier that morning. He hands it to Christian and tells him to deliver it to Roxane in Christian's own name. Christian is confused. Cyrano explains that he always has a letter handy—a letter he usually composes for an imaginary love. Cyrano assures Christian that his letter will apply perfectly to Roxane. Christian is overjoyed with this news, and embraces Cyrano as a friend.

It's a mark of Christian's dimness that he doesn't deduce right away that Cyrano is in love with Roxane—he buys the argument that Cyrano, as a poet, always has a perfect love letter in his pocket. We now see the central conceit of the play, which starts here as a "romantic comedy"—a formula still commonly used in movies today, in which someone uses some kind of deceit or trick to win over another's love, and then that deceit is revealed, and then the two lovers are reconciled. It's only later that the comedy becomes a more complicated "tragicomedy," as we will see.

ACT 2, SCENE 11

Outside the pastry shop, the cadets are gathered, waiting to hear the sounds of Cyrano attacking Christian for insulting his **nose**. One cadet pokes his head into a window and is shocked to see Christian and Cyrano embracing.

Already Cyrano is sacrificing his most prized asset—his reputation—in order to help Christian, a man he clearly dislikes (or at least doesn't respect). Cyrano's peers see him embracing Christian and conclude that he's changing or "going soft."

The group concludes that Cyrano no longer minds people talking about his **nose**. Emboldened, a Second Musketeer goes up to Cyrano and insults his nose. Cyrano immediately hits the Musketeer for his rudeness. The cadets laugh and cheer—the "good old Cyrano" is back.

For the time being, Cyrano's reputation as a fighter and an aggressive opponent is so strong that one strike is enough to make the cadets forget Cyrano's seemingly out-of-character interactions with Christian. Only Le Bret and Ragueneau know that Cyrano is helping Christian because he himself loves Roxane.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

The third act (still set in the year 1640) begins in a small public square in Paris, adjacent to Roxane's house. Ragueneau and the Duenna stand talking, and Ragueneau explains to the Duenna that his wife, Lise, has left him for a handsome Musketeer. Ragueneau was so devastated by the news that he tried to hang himself. Luckily, Cyrano walked in on Ragueneau just as he was about to die. Cyrano used his sword to cut his friend down, and convinced him to live. He then got Ragueneau a job working as a steward for Roxane.

As we enter the second half of the play, things get significantly darker, even if they're still draped in Rostand's comedy and witty language. Ragueneau's tenure as the town's beloved pastry chef has, inevitably, come to an end: his wife left him for a less "comic" figure, and, perhaps more to the point, he couldn't keep getting paid in poetry forever. All this is both comedic and a foreshadowing of tragedy to come.

The Duenna, listening to Ragueneau's story, calls out to Roxane. Roxane is scheduled to visit a nearby house to hear a lecture of poets who will discuss the "Tender Passion." Suddenly, the sound of lute music fills the air. Cyrano enters, followed by two musicians. Cyrano hums along with the music, but corrects the musicians at several points, eventually playing a lute himself.

Cyrano has many talents, and apparently has good taste in everything. He is a true romantic: a poet, a social rebel and outsider, a lover capable of great and dramatic emotion, and even a player of the lute, one of the most quintessentially romantic of all instruments.

The Duenna greets Cyrano and asks him why he's walking with lute players. Cyrano explains that he's won a bet with an associate, D'Assoucy, the stakes of which were "music for a day." With this, Cyrano sends the musicians away.

It's entirely appropriate that the stakes of a bet with Cyrano would be "music for a day": something objectively worthless, but extremely valuable to someone like Cyrano, who appreciates such things above other, more mundane (but practical) "winnings."

Roxane emerges from her home and greets Cyrano. She gushes that Christian is brilliant and handsome—she has read "his" letter, which, she believes, proves that he has even more wit than Cyrano himself. She reads Cyrano lines from the letter, and Cyrano criticizes them. Roxane laughs that Cyrano is only jealous—that is, as one poet, he's naturally jealous of other poets. Roxane explains that "Christian" has been sending her many letters lately, each of which is lovelier than the last. As Cyrano and Roxane talk outside her house, the Count de Guiche appears. Roxane pushes Cyrano into her house before the Count can see him.

The various subplots of the play now start intersecting in a satisfying (but somewhat tragic) way. Cyrano is forced to endure the simultaneous pleasure and agony of writing beautiful letters to the love of his life and getting no credit for doing so. It's interesting that Cyrano criticizes his own writing—for all his pride in himself, he can't bear to see his words stolen away from him, and clever self-deprecation has always been a part of his wit and "panache." And, just in case we'd forgotten, Rostand here reminds us that Roxane is also being courted by the rich, powerful Count de Guiche, a man who has a significant amount of power over both Cyrano and Christian, who are his military subordinates.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

The Count de Guiche appears outside Roxane's house. He explains that he is heading off into battle. Roxane wishes him farewell, and he is offended that she doesn't seem more concerned for his wellbeing. De Guiche adds that since he's going off to battle, he'll be joined by the Guards regiment—the group headed by Cyrano. Roxane is horrified, as this means that Christian will be sent off to fight, as well.

Here Rostand contrasts Roxane's selflessness with de Guiche's selfishness. While Roxane thinks of the love of her life—a man who doesn't actually exist, but whom she thinks of as Christian—and fears for his safety, de Guiche rudely asks Roxane why she isn't more concerned about his own safety. Clearly he had hoped to impress her by risking his life in battle.

Roxane asks de Guiche if he's ordering Cyrano and his troops into battle out of spite for Cyrano's boasting and disrespect. De Guiche admits that he is. Roxane tells de Guiche that the best way to get revenge on Cyrano isn't to send him into battle: a natural soldier like Cyrano would only welcome such an opportunity. Instead, de Guiche should keep Cyrano stationed at home, frustrating him enormously. De Guiche is extremely pleased with this idea, and he promises Roxane that he'll keep Cyrano and his soldiers in Paris, as "proof of love" for Roxane.

The full extent of de Guiche's villainy becomes more clear. De Guiche is willing to use his position to arrange a man's death in order to avenge an insult. An honorable man would simply challenge Cyrano to a duel, but de Guiche probably knows he'd have no chance in such a fight. De Guiche's blustering, overly aggressive manner contrasts amusingly with Roxane's clever, measured conversation, and she manipulates de Guiche into saving her loved ones' lives for a little longer.

De Guiche, now convinced that Roxane is on his side, tells Roxane that he'll come to visit her in a few days, disguised with a mask (with his uncle Richelieu's help). Roxane protests that de Guiche would be disgracing himself by leaving battle to visit her. She decides to allow de Guiche to visit her, in order to ensure that Christian stays in Paris. With this, de Guiche kisses Roxane's hand and leaves.

Notably, Roxane is willing to sacrifice her own happiness and dignity for the sake of her beloved Christian. Like Cyrano, she's fiercely loyal to the people she loves, and makes sacrifices to help them.

As de Guiche leaves, Roxane calls the Duenna and tells her to keep secret what she's arranged with the Count. Cyrano must never know that Roxane has deprived him of a chance to earn honor in battle.

Roxane now has a secret of her own—she's going behind Cyrano's back for his own good. This secret elegantly balances out the larger secrets between Cyrano and Christian, and between Roxane and Cyrano.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

After de Guiche leaves, Cyrano emerges from the house, and Roxane, the Duenna, and Cyrano walk across the square to the house of Clomire, where the discourse on love is being hosted. Roxane is excited to hear two supposedly wise men lecture on philosophy, but Cyrano mutters that these men are "apes."

In the 17th century, lectures of this kind were popular among the middle and upper classes. The new popularity of the Petrarchan love sonnet (see Background Info), as well as the continued popularity of the chivalric tradition, gave the public a strong interest in the "science of love." In retrospect, most of these lectures and treatises on love were nonsensical, as Cyrano says—love can't be quantified or studied so easily.

Roxane tells Cyrano that she's sure Christian will attend the lecture. She tells him that she's looking forward to talking to Christian off the cuff, so that she can get a better impression of his mind and his wit. Roxane then enters Clomire's house, leaving Cyrano standing outside. When the door is closed, Cyrano calls for Christian, and Christian rushes toward him. (The script does not specify from where.)

The scene ends on a note of uncertainty. We know very well that Christian is no good in conversation, and we know that Cyrano knows this too. So it's not certain if Cyrano is letting Christian talk to Roxane because he wants Christian to fail, or because he thinks that Christian is finally ready to handle Roxane on his own. It's likely that Cyrano himself doesn't know the answer.

ACT 3, SCENE 4

Outside Clomire's house, Cyrano and Christian discuss Roxane. Christian insists that he's going to wait outside the house for Roxane. After weeks of sending Roxane love letters, he's eager to meet her and talk to her face-to-face. Christian assures Cyrano that he's learned enough from reading Cyrano's letters to hold his own in a conversation with her. Cyrano decides to allow Christian to speak to Roxane on his own, and he walks behind a nearby wall, leaving Christian alone outside the house.

In a sense, Christian has spent the last few weeks receiving an education from Cyrano—an education in how to express his feelings and couch his love in the European tradition of rhetoric. The scene being set up here, then, is a "test" of whether or not eloquence can be taught, or whether it's somehow innate to the speaker. This section of the text parallels the philosophers' lecture on love—it poses some of the same questions about feeling, education, and expression.

ACT 3, SCENE 5

The lecture at Clomire's house has just finished, and Roxane is leaving with her Duenna—they arrived far too late, and missed the entire lecture. As Roxane steps out, she notices Christian standing nearby. She greets Christian and invites him to walk and converse with her.

It's important to remember that the scenes of this play follow each other without any temporal breaks—in other words, Roxane is walking out of the lecture only a few minutes after entering it. It's symbolically fitting that Roxane misses the lecture on love—if there's an easy road to romance, none of the characters know of it.

Christian begins his conversation with Roxane by saying, "I love you." But he finds that he can only repeat his sentiment, or say similar things, such as "I love you so." Roxane is unimpressed, and gets up to leave. Not knowing what to say, Christian exclaims, "I love thee not!" then realizes his mistake. Amused and disappointed, Roxane walks back into her house. As Roxane walks away, Cyrano emerges from behind the wall, whispering to himself, "It is successful!"

Christian begins with the simplest and sincerest expression of how he feels—"I love you"—but this just isn't enough. Roxane doesn't want simple sincerity—she wants sincerity decorated in fancy phrases and elaborate rhetorical maneuvers. In short, she wants the appearance *of love (along with proof of her lover's worth and intelligence) as much as she wants love in itself. It's unclear if this was Cyrano's intention all along, but he is obviously pleased to see his "student" humiliate himself in front of Roxane—and Cyrano himself can keep his conscience clear, as he hasn't broken any promises to either Roxane or Christian. Another conclusion to draw from this scene is that even now, Roxane seems to love Christian more for his words than his appearance—he stands before her in all his handsomeness, but she rejects him when he can't produce Cyrano's wit and wisdom. All this adds to the tragic aspect of the play, as it's suggested that Roxane may have been able to love Cyrano all along, if he'd only admitted his feelings to her instead of hiding behind Christian.*

ACT 3, SCENE 6

Cyrano walks toward Christian, who has just done poorly in his first conversation with Roxane. Christian cries out to Cyrano, "Come to my aid!" Cyrano agrees to help Christian. He sees Roxane in a high window of the house. He directs Christian to shout up to her—Cyrano will provide him with the script. Just as Christian is about to speak, Cyrano's musicians reappear. Cyrano directs them to stand around the corner and keep watch, playing music if anyone passes nearby: happy music if it's a woman, sad music if it's a man.

Despite the pleasure Cyrano just took in Christian's failure, his sense of loyalty or honor takes over again and he once more helps Christian to seduce Roxane. Cyrano is acting as both playwright and director here: he's staging a scene for Roxane's benefit, writing an impeccable script, coaching an actor in how to deliver his lines, and even getting musicians to announce when a new "character" enters.

Christian calls up to Roxane. Roxane replies disdainfully that she doesn't care to speak to him further. Christian, prompted by Cyrano, tells Roxane that he loves her more and more every day. His poor heart, he goes on, beats with love for Roxane. Roxane is impressed by Christian's newfound eloquence, though she notes that he sounds strained and hesitant. Exasperated, Cyrano switches places with Christian and, imitating Christian's voice, gives a beautiful speech for Roxane. He says that his love is like a vast mountain—so vast that it takes time to climb. Roxane is overcome with love, and tells "Christian" to climb up to see her. Cyrano—still pretending to be Christian—refuses, saying that it is best to speak without seeing one another clearly.

This scene portrays a unique notion of love. Although Roxane's first real meeting with Christian is a disaster, Cyrano manages to salvage Christian's effort by pretending to be Christian himself—something of a parody of the famous balcony scene from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Roxane's feelings for Christian aren't entirely Platonic (meaning associated with the mind or spirit of a person) or physical, but somewhere in between: she's attracted to Christian's face, but also finds herself attracted to "Christian's" mind and heart. Although Cyrano claims it's best for Roxane not to see him clearly, the fact remains that Roxane still probably has Christian's handsome appearance in her mind even as she also falls for Cyrano's eloquence.

Cyrano continues wooing Roxane. He praises Roxane's beautiful eyes and her sweet voice. As he goes on, his voice becomes increasingly confident, until he's speaking in long stanzas without any interruption. He professes to feel true love for Roxane: a trembling in his entire body, so powerful that it drowns him in passion and jealousy. He ends his monologue by kissing a nearby hanging plant.

The way this scene is staged, we see that Cyrano becomes more confident and more rapturous in his own feelings for Roxane as he continues speaking. Cyrano has always loved Roxane, but it's not until this moment, when he's pretending to be someone else, that he truly feels the freedom to express real passion for her. The relationship between Cyrano and Christian seems truly symbiotic—they each need the other in order to fully love Roxane. Cyrano needs the physical anonymity of assuming Christian's identity, and Christian needs Cyrano's words to clarify and strengthen his own feelings.

After Cyrano's speech, Roxane begins to weep with love for "Christian." Christian himself then calls out, "A kiss!" Roxane is taken aback by his request, and Cyrano whispers to Christian that he's being too hasty. Christian whispers back that he knows exactly what he's doing. The two men whisper-argue so that Roxane can't hear anything. Confused, she withdraws to her room. As she does so, sad *and* happy music plays. Someone is coming, Cyrano concludes—someone neither happy nor sad: a monk.

Christian's love for Roxane seems purely physical. He barely knows her at all, and seems unwilling to wait for more letters and elaborate speeches: he just wants to kiss her. Cyrano, it's assumed, wants to kiss Roxane as well, but as long as he's acting under Christian's identity, he wants their love to remain purely Platonic—he suggests that Christian not have any contact with Roxane at all yet. Appropriately, Roxane's love for "Christian" is both physical and Platonic: she wants this man's body and *his mind. The problem is that her beloved's mind and body belong to two different people.*

ACT 3, SCENE 7

A Monk finds Cyrano and Christian standing outside Roxane's house. The Monk tells the men he's looking for the house of Roxane. Cyrano points the Monk toward a distant street, and the Monk thanks the men and moves on.

In a moment of sudden comedic bathos (a shift from the sublime to the vulgar or absurd), the hapless Monk interrupts Cyrano and Christian's elaborate seduction of Roxane.

ACT 3, SCENE 8

Alone outside Roxane's house, Cyrano and Christian discuss how to proceed with wooing Roxane. Christian begs Cyrano to speak more with Roxane, enabling him to kiss her that evening. Cyrano promises to speak more with her. Suddenly, Roxane opens her window again, and Christian dives under the balcony, out of her view.

Christian is well aware that he entirely depends on Cyrano to seduce Roxane. Similarly Cyrano, by this point, seems perfectly open to the idea that he needs Christian to seduce Roxane: though the two men haven't gotten along in the past, they now recognize that they "complete" each other.

ACT 3, SCENE 9

Cyrano resumes speaking to Roxane, who's standing at a high window. Imitating Christian once again, Cyrano tells Roxane that she must not be bashful when he asks her for a kiss. A kiss, he explains, is a promise—a confirmation of love. As he speaks, his voice becomes warmer and more confident. Then, suddenly, Roxane interjects that he, "Christian," is very handsome. Cyrano keeps talking, but his voice grows cooler. Roxane, overcome with passion, tells Christian to climb up to her. Strangely, Christian is hesitant to climb, and Cyrano has to force him to do so. Christian climbs up to the high window, where he kisses Roxane. Meanwhile, on the ground, Cyrano talks to himself, and whispers that he feels like he's kissing Roxane himself.

Cyrano has a smooth explanation for everything, even Christian's rash (for the time) request for a kiss. Ingeniously, Cyrano frames his kiss with Roxane as a promise of something greater and nobler to come. This is a clever way to spin the kiss, since it suggests that "Christian" isn't just in this for the physical rewards—he's also committed to a long-lasting, spiritual relationship with Roxane. The frustrating aspect of Cyrano and Christian's partnership is that even though Cyrano arguably plays the more important role in seducing Roxane, it's Christian who gets all the pleasure of kissing her.

Suddenly sad and happy music fills the air—the Monk is back. Roxane and Christian look down from the window, and see—of course—Cyrano standing below. Christian, feigning surprise, greets Cyrano. Cyrano pretends to have been looking for Christian. Roxane climbs down to talk to Cyrano.

The threads of the storyline now cross in ways that provoke some amusing dramatic irony. For example, we know that Cyrano and Christian know each other very well, but Roxane and the Monk assume they are strangers meeting by chance.

ACT 3, SCENE 10

The Monk walks through the square, complaining that he's still looking for Roxane's home. He greets Cyrano, and then Roxane, Christian, and Ragueneau emerge from Roxane's house. Roxane asks what's going on, and the Monk explains that he's come to deliver a letter from the Count de Guiche to Roxane. Roxane snatches the letter from the Monk's hand and opens it. In the letter, which Roxane reads quietly to herself so that the Monk cannot hear, the Count explains to Roxane that he intends to visit her, disguised by a mask, that very night.

The Count de Guiche comes across as a less impressive version of Cyrano. Like Cyrano, he's infatuated with Roxane and has some talent for deception and intrigue, but whereas Cyrano is both a more talented trickster and a more selfless human being (willing to sacrifice his happiness for Christian's sake), de Guiche proves himself to be a selfish man and a fairly unoriginal deceiver.

Roxane reads aloud a different version of the letter, so that the Monk can hear her. Roxane claims the letter says that the Count de Guiche wants the Monk to marry Roxane to Christian on the spot. Roxane rushes the Monk and Christian inside her house so that they can be married at once. Roxane tells Cyrano to keep watch outside, since she now knows the Count will be visiting her that night.

For one of the first times in the play, we get a sense for Roxane's own ingenuity and quick thinking. Like Cyrano, she uses her wit to get what she wants, here manipulating the gullible Monk into marrying her to Christian immediately. This reinforces the idea that Roxane probably leans more towards Cyrano's part of her fictional "Christian."

Cyrano stands outside, frustrated by Roxane and Christian's marriage. Then he hears sad music playing—there is a man coming. Cyrano climbs up a nearby tree, ready to jump down at the right time.

Cyrano, in spite of his frustration, is always a fundamentally loyal and honorable man, and here he keeps guard over his beloved's home—doing nothing while she marries another man.

ACT 3, SCENE 11

The Count de Guiche enters the square, wearing a mask, and wonders aloud where the Monk could be. Cyrano has a sudden flash of inspiration. He pulls his hat low over his face, jumps down from the tree, and falls hard on the floor. Slowly, he gets up, pretending to be lost in amazement. The Count asks him what's going on. Cyrano replies, in a Gascon accent, that he's fallen from the moon. De Guiche is alarmed—clearly this unrecognizable foreigner has gone insane.

Here Cyrano out-tricks de Guiche at his own game of trickery. Though de Guiche disguises himself with a mask, Cyrano puts on a more elaborate mask of his own— disguising his face, affecting an elaborate accent, and acting like an entirely different person. Cyrano's talent for impersonations is an important part of his character. It's suggested that the "real" Cyrano is the vulnerable, sensitive man who loves Roxane, but Cyrano spends so much of his time and energy performing in different roles (the macho fighter, the extravagant poet, etc.) that these "appearances" also become a part of the "real" Cyrano. For Rostand, appearance and identity are in some ways inextricable.

Cyrano continues acting crazy, distracting de Guiche from the wedding taking place inside Roxane's house. He rambles about space, pretending there's a bear's tooth stuck in his leg from the constellation of the Great Bear (the Big Dipper) and milk in his nose from the Milky Way, and also references the ancient Greeks Regiomontanus (a mathematician and astronomer) and Archytas (a mathematician and philosopher). The entire time, he prevents de Guiche from walking to Roxane's door. Cyrano claims to have invented no less than six methods for flight, including building a hot air balloon, building a giant mechanical grasshopper, and covering his body with magnets. Cyrano says that eventually chose a seventh method for flying: waiting for high tide at night, so that the moon's force drew him up away from the ground.

Once again Cyrano puts on a kind of play within the play. In this case, he has a very clear motive for his performance: he needs to both confuse and entertain the Count for long enough to allow the Monk to marry Christian and Roxane without interruption. Cyrano's act is ridiculous, but there are complicated motives behind it. He nobly wants to remain loyal to Roxane and Christian by helping them, but he also seems almost intentionally self-sabotaging in order to prove his heroism to himself. It would be easy for him to let de Guiche interrupt the marriage, thus keeping Roxane free for Cyrano to pursue her under his own name, but instead Cyrano throws all his effort into an act that is simultaneously protecting his beloved and ensuring his rival's victory. Within the performance itself, Cyrano displays his usual wit, inventiveness, and education, waxing poetical about the heavens (a typical subject of love poetry) just after he has been talking so ecstatically to the woman he loves.

The Count de Guiche hears Roxane's voice, and there are sounds of claps and cheers from inside the house. Recognizing that Roxane and Christian are now married, Cyrano removes his hat and sheds his accent, coolly informing the Count that Roxane is now married to someone else. Roxane and Christian emerge from the house, holding hands.

Cyrano's performance has been a success: he's annoyed the Count, but also entertained him just enough to distract him for fifteen minutes. Cyrano has poured himself into a performance that ultimately makes him miserable: he's helping the love of his life, Roxane, marry someone else.

ACT 3, SCENE 12

Outside Roxane's house, the Count de Guiche stares amazedly at Cyrano, Roxane, and Christian. De Guiche gives credit where it's due, and compliments Cyrano for his clever performance. The Monk then emerges from the house and tells the Count that he's married Roxane to Christian—just as the Count asked. Furious, the Count clarifies that he never wanted this to happen.

One early sign that de Guiche isn't an entirely villainous figure is that he compliments Cyrano for his excellent performance. De Guiche may be petty and selfish, but at least he can recognize great art when he sees it, and for Cyrano, being able to recognize and appreciate art is almost a moral imperative.

Spitefully, the Count de Guiche tells Cyrano and Christian that he'll now arrange for the two of them to be shipped off to fight, along with the rest of the cadets. He sarcastically tells Roxane that she'll have to wait to consummate her marriage. Privately, Cyrano mutters that he's not too sad about this. As de Guiche turns to leave, Roxane begs Cyrano to protect Christian in battle and make sure he writes often. Cyrano promises that he will do his best.

It's an important detail that Roxane and Christian never consummate their relationship (that is, have sex), and their love is always unfulfilled and incomplete. This fact is truer even than Roxane recognizes: her love for Christian is only "half" what she thinks it is, since her attraction to Christian's eloquence and intelligence is really love for Cyrano. Cyrano's loyalty seems to know no bounds: even though Christian is his rival for Roxane's love, Cyrano again agrees to protect him, perhaps concluding that he has no chance with Roxane now that she's married.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

The fourth act begins outside the enemy city of Arras (in Northern France), still in the year 1640. The cadets sit huddled around a fire. Captain Carbon and Le Bret keep watch while Christian sleeps alongside his peers. Le Bret tells Carbon that there is a famine in the camp. As they talk, they hear someone approaching—it is Cyrano de Bergerac. Cyrano has just come from delivering his latest letter to Roxane. Cyrano explains to Le Bret that Roxane has instructed Cyrano to make sure that "Christian" writes often to her—as a result, Cyrano sends a new letter every day at dawn. Le Bret admires Cyrano for his bravery (he must put himself in danger to deliver the letters), and notes, sadly, that Roxane must never know that her beloved Christian is slowly dying of starvation as the siege of Arras goes on. In response, Cyrano simply says that he needs to get to work writing tomorrow's letter—with this, he goes into his tent.

After the madcap comedy of Act 3, it now comes as a shock to see the miserable state of the French army. Christian and Cyrano are both suffering on account of de Guiche's spiteful revenge and the harsh realities of war. And yet Cyrano, who's committed to keeping Roxane's love as pure and untainted as possible, doesn't say anything in his letter about the famine in the French camps. Cyrano is faithfully keeping his promise to protect Christian and make sure he writes, but of course Cyrano is also writing because he *wants to—because writing to Roxane is the only channel through which he can express his feelings for her.*

ACT 4, SCENE 2

At dawn outside the city of Arras, the cadets moan with hunger. Captain Carbon walks around the camp, softly calling Cyrano's name. As Carbon walks around, the army's resident hunters, the Angler (fisherman) and the Sportsman, return bearing a gudgeon (a small fish) and a sparrow. Furious with the meager amount of food, the cadets mutter that they're ready to mutiny.

Ironically, even though the French army is supposed to be starving out the city of Arras (i.e., besieging the city), it's the French themselves who are starving.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

As Captain Carbon goes around searching for Cyrano, Cyrano emerges from a tent and greets Carbon. Cyrano looks at the band of hungry cadets. Despite their complaints of hunger, Cyrano tosses them a copy of Homer's *Iliad* and tells them to "devour" it.

Cyrano's Romanticism is clearer now than ever: much like Ragueneau in Act 2, he subscribes to the idea that words are a fitting replacement for food. Indeed, we never see Cyrano eat in this act, furthering the illusion that Cyrano's spirit and his love for Roxane provide sufficient nourishment for him to survive.

Cyrano seats himself among his cadets. He tells them to take their minds off food by playing music. An old soldier produces a flute and begins to play a pastoral melody. Cyrano murmurs that the music will remind the cadets of the woods, the fields, and the farmlands. The cadets bow their heads as they hear the music, and some cry. Carbon is amazed that Cyrano has accomplished so much with music—Cyrano explains to him that he's made his cadets homesick, and heartache is better than stomachache.

Cyrano's response to his soldiers' hunger is to play music for them—and this music would have had special significance for the 19th century Parisians attending Rostand's play. While the Gascons were regarded as crude peasants in the 17th century, by the 19th century and the Industrial Revolution, Gascon was regarded as a Romanticized bastion of an idyllic past. It's important to recognize that Cyrano doesn't actually "cure" his soldiers' hunger; he just replaces one kind of hunger with another.

A cadet notices that Count de Guiche is about to arrive at the camp. The other cadets moan and groan—de Guiche is regarded as a snob and a bully. Cyrano tells his men to play cards and dice, so that they don't seem miserable before de Guiche. He produces a book and begins reading.

Even when his men are dying of starvation, Cyrano remains committed to appearances. He can't stand to show weakness in front of de Guiche, the man who's cruelly sent him and Christian into war. Cyrano knows that it's important to project an image of confidence and stability, so as not to give de Guiche any satisfaction.

ACT 4, SCENE 4

Count de Guiche arrives at the camp and greets Captain Carbon. De Guiche announces that he's heard rumors that the cadets—whom he calls louts and fools—hate him. He threatens to punish any soldier who disobeys or mocks him, reminding everyone of his feats of strength in battle. Cyrano, without lifting his eyes from his book, asks de Guiche about the **white scarf** that he wears as a symbol of his high rank. De Guiche feels flattered that Cyrano has heard about this, but admits that in the middle of danger in battle, he dropped the scarf so that he appeared to be just another soldier and wouldn't be targeted. Cyrano then claims that he (Cyrano) would have worn the white scarf himself, even though it would have made him a target for the enemy. The Count contests this, and says that the scarf is surely lost now and full of bullet holes, as no one could have been brave enough to retrieve it. Cyrano then produces the scarf from his pocket and gives it to de Guiche. The cadets laugh.

This is one of the most important sections in the entire play, but its meaning is slightly obscured when translated into English. The white scarf that de Guiche wears in battle is a latter-day version of the "panache" (a white feather) that the famous French monarch Henry IV wore to set an example to his troops. Thus, by stealing de Guiche's scarf, Cyrano is, quite literally, claiming the Count's "panache"—that is, his bravery, his flamboyance, and his pride—for himself. (For more on this word, see Themes and Background Info.) There's also a strong class critique at work in this scene—instead of showing proper respect for his social superiors, Cyrano doesn't even look up from his book as he humiliates the Count and proves that he himself is the braver man.

De Guiche reluctantly accepts the **white scarf** from Cyrano. He then waves the scarf to a "useful spy" in his employ, stationed far away (i.e., off-stage). De Guiche explains to the French troops that he's been using this spy to collect important information about the enemy. De Guiche claims that his spy has told him that the enemy plans to attack soon. De Guiche then waves his white plume in the spy's direction. He claims that he's just used his plume to signal to the spy where his troops are strongest. The fighting, he concludes, should begin within an hour. Cyrano sarcastically thanks de Guiche for choosing *his* troops to fight the enemy.

De Guiche isn't just trying to defeat the Spanish—he's also engineering the battle in such a way that the Spanish will specifically attack Cyrano's unit. De Guiche is abusing his rank and power to try and get both his rival (Christian) and a man he hates (Cyrano) killed. Cyrano certainly recognizes what the Count is doing, which is why he sarcastically thanks him for "choosing them." It's appropriate that the Count uses his white scarf to signal his spy—what was supposed to be a symbol of nobility and bravery becomes, in de Guiche's hands, a "flag" of treachery.

Cyrano and Carbon must now plan their defense against the enemy. Cyrano calls for Christian, who's weak from hunger, and can only think of Roxane. Cyrano shows Christian that he's written a new letter for Christian to present to Roxane. Christian reads the letter approvingly, but notices that there appears to be a tearstain on the parchment. Cyrano sheepishly admits that even he cried while composing the letter.

Thus far, Cyrano has been able to conceal his feelings for Roxane around Christian, and Christian seems too dull to notice the obvious. But this concealment can't last forever, and the tearstain on the parchment is another strong clue leading Christian to figure out the truth.

A sentinel cries out that there is a carriage approaching the camp. As the carriage approaches, the sentinel shouts that the carriage is in the service of the King of France. Quickly, Cyrano orders his troops to stand up straight as a show of respect for whomever the King has sent. Roxane then emerges from the carriage, much to the Count de Guiche's surprise.

Ironically, Roxane comes to visit Christian at the exact moment when Christian is about to realize that Cyrano is in love with Roxane. Rostand's play is full of such "coincidental" tragicomic timing.

ACT 4, SCENE 5

A carriage carrying Roxane has just arrived at the camp. Christian rushes forward to embrace Roxane, and asks her why she's here. Cyrano mutters to himself, "dare I look at her?" Roxane explains that she's arranged for a royal carriage to drive her out into the war-torn country. She was able to move past enemy lines, she says, with "woman's tricks." Whenever a soldier asked her where she was going, she would give a dazzling smile and explain that she was going to see her lover.

Cyrano's love for Roxane seems almost purely intellectual and spiritual at this point, however it may have started out: he can't even stand to look at her, so painful is the knowledge that she's married to someone else. We're also reminded here that Roxane is a match for Cyrano's cleverness and bravery—like Cyrano himself, she sneaks across enemy lines for the sake of love. She also exhibits her own kind of "panache" here.

Reluctantly, Christian tells Roxane that she'll need to leave immediately—a battle is about to begin. Roxane refuses to leave, though, and promises to stay with Christian, her beloved husband. The other cadets promise to protect both Roxane and Christian. Roxane accuses de Guiche of deliberately trying to make her a widow, but he denies this. Then the Count leaves, saying he needs to inspect a cannon.

There are many different kinds of love on display in this part of the play, but the one thing that unites them all is the willingness to sacrifice one's own interests for another person. Cyrano sacrifices his own happiness to keep a promise to Roxane, and Roxane is willing to risk her life to be with Christian. De Guiche's selfish pettiness then seems especially out of place in this moment.

ACT 4, SCENE 6

Christian and Cyrano beg Roxane to leave the camp before a battle breaks out. Roxane refuses. The other cadets murmur that they could now die happily, having seen Roxane's beautiful face—if only they could also have some food to eat. Carbon criticizes the cadets for thinking of food at a time like this. Roxane smiles and announces that she has brought food for the army: pasties, wine, etc. The cadets sprint to the carriage, where they find Ragueneau, bearing boxes of delicious food. The cadets feast on their food, yet neither Cyrano nor Christian eats anything.

Rostand make a clever analogy here. In the earlier scenes of Act 4, Cyrano had posed a dichotomy between poetry and food—in other words, between spiritual nourishment and physical nourishment. We can then see the similarity between this dichotomy and the dichotomy of the kinds of love—physical love and spiritual love. Essentially, poetry stands for spiritual or intellectual love, and food for physical love. Therefore, it's appropriate that Roxane nourishes both the soldiers' spirits and their stomachs: she embodies both kinds of love. It's also telling that neither Cyrano nor Christian eats anything. Either they're in too much emotional turmoil to have an appetite, or else they're both trying to seem brave in front of Roxane.

Christian demands to know why Roxane came to see him. Roxane tells Christian that she'll explain as soon as she's finished feeding the soldiers. Suddenly, Le Bret calls out that the Count de Guiche is about to return from his cannon inspection. Cyrano yells for the soldiers to hide their food and wine. Immediately all the soldiers hide their food.

It seems that Christian has started to realize that Roxane more truly loves the "Cyrano" aspect of him now, and that Cyrano loves Roxane back. Of course, there is also an entire war going on at the same time, so it seems unlikely that the truth will be revealed without some kind of misunderstanding or tragedy.

ACT 4, SCENE 7

The Count de Guiche arrives back at the camp and sees his men, who are trying to disguise the fact that they've been drinking a lot of wine. The cadets laugh and snigger at de Guiche, claiming that they're "excited" by the prospect of a battle. De Guiche says that he's brought a cannon to the camp, which the troops should use in battle. He asks Roxane if she's planning to stay or leave, and Roxane replies that she'll stay. De Guiche promises to stay on the battlefield as well, defending Roxane from danger. The cadets, impressed, agree to give de Guiche something to eat. They "discover" the food and wine they were eating, and offer some to de Guiche. De Guiche, who's beginning to speak in the Gascon accent of the cadets, proudly says that he'll eat only after fighting. The cadets laugh and cheer for de Guiche.

Here Rostand gives de Guiche new layers, making him less of a one-note villain and more of a potentially sympathetic character. De Guiche may not be as brave as Cyrano, but he's clearly still in love with Roxane and willing to endanger his life to protect her from harm. (Because of his rank and nobility, he otherwise wouldn't have had to be involved in the actual fighting.) The soldiers, impressed with de Guiche's promises, reward him with the food and wine that only a few minutes ago they weren't going to share with him. De Guiche also symbolically embraces a more democratic perspective by switching from a haughty tone of voice to a Gascon accent—acting like one of the troops instead of someone superior and aloof.

Captain Carbon runs into the camp and explains that pikemen (soldiers bearing long spears) have arrived to reinforce the cadets' defense. De Guiche leads Roxane to the pikemen. While Roxane is away, Cyrano tells Christian to be careful while talking to Roxane—if Roxane talks about his letters, he must not look surprised. Cyrano explains that he's sent Roxane many letters—some of which Christian didn't know about—in Christian's name. Cyrano has sent Roxane two letters a day since going off to fight.

Amidst all the suffering of war, Cyrano hasn't been able to contain the full extent of his love for Roxane, and he even wrote her additional letters without telling Christian. This is an important detail, because it suggests that Cyrano can't "share" all of his love for Roxane with Christian—Cyrano's love is still something private and precious to him, and most of it has been kept a secret even from Christian, his "partner."

ACT 4, SCENE 8

Christian and Roxane talk to each other while Cyrano, Carbon, and de Guiche busily shout orders. Christian asks Roxane why she's come to see him, and Roxane replies, surprised, that "his" letters summoned her. Christian's writing, she explains, is so beautiful that she knew she had to see him.

The ruse starts to fall apart, as Christian is visibly clueless about the power of the letters he supposedly wrote. It seems inevitable that the truth will soon come out.

Roxane explains that at first, she only loved Christian for his handsome looks. Now, though, she's sure that he has a brilliant mind as well. Even if Christian lost his handsome face, she insists, she'd still love him. Christian is dismayed by this news, and he urges Roxane to return to the "first kind" of love—that is, to love him for his handsomeness. Christian says that he has a lot to tell her, but first Roxane must go to see the other cadets, as her beauty and kindness will inspire them to fight bravely. Roxane smiles and goes up to the cadets.

From Roxane's perspective, her relationship with Christian is becoming more and more serious as it becomes more "Platonic"—she's moving past her physical infatuation with his beauty, and becoming attached to his spirit and intellect alone. From Christian's perspective, of course, this is disastrous news: Roxane is rejecting her love for what was truly "his" in the Christian/Cyrano alliance—her love for his appearance.

ACT 4, SCENE 9

Christian runs to speak to Cyrano. He explains that Roxane doesn't love him at all—she only loves the letters he claims to have written. In other words, Roxane loves Cyrano, not Christian. Christian accuses Cyrano of loving Roxane—clearly he does, since no one could write such passionate love letters otherwise. Cyrano admits that Christian is right: he does love Roxane. Christian asks Cyrano why he doesn't tell Roxane himself, and Cyrano replies that his **nose** and face are too ugly.

Here, the inevitable happens: Christian finds out that Cyrano, his mentor, is actually his greatest rival in love. Cyrano reiterates what he'd already expressed to Le Bret: he can never admit his love to Roxane, because there's no way that she could love someone as ugly as he is. This is both tragic and dramatically ironic, of course, as we've just learned that Roxane could, *in fact, love Cyrano (and she probably already does, though she doesn't know his true identity).*

Christian tells Cyrano that they must let Roxane choose between them. Cyrano says this is ludicrous—he can't bear to think of Roxane turning him down for his ugly appearance. Nevertheless, Christian calls for Roxane. Roxane comes toward him, and Christian explains that Cyrano has something important he wants to tell her. With these words, he leaves.

Amusingly, the tables have turned: now Christian is the wise, levelheaded one, and Cyrano is the shy, immature lover. We are now clearly approaching the climax, where then deception of the play's "romantic comedy" aspect will be either revealed or concealed at the same time that a battle is breaking out.

ACT 4, SCENE 10

Cyrano stands with Roxane. Roxane asks Cyrano what's wrong with Christian. She guesses that he has doubts about whether she truly loves him. Cyrano carefully asks Roxane if she truly loves Christian for his wit, not for his face. Roxane insists that she does—even if Christian were hideously disfigured, she says, she'd still love him just as much.

Cyrano excels at using performances and masks, and here he tries something especially complicated: he finds a way to ask Roxane if she loves him without ever actually bringing up himself (instead, he mentions Christian). This reminds us of why Cyrano agreed to help Christian seduce Roxane in the first place (at least in part): through Christian, Cyrano could woo Roxane and profess his love to her without the indignity of being denied or rejected. Here Roxane confirms that she has moved on from the physical to a purely "Platonic" or intellectual love. Of course, it's impossible to know just how true this really is right now—it's easy for her to say *she'd love Christian even if he were ugly, but the fact remains that he* isn't *ugly. Yet for all intents and purposes, her words seem sincere.*

Cyrano, seemingly satisfied that Roxane is capable of loving a man for his wit, not his face, tells Roxane that he needs to tell her something immediately. Suddenly, Le Bret runs up to Cyrano and whispers something in his ear. Cyrano is stunned—he says, "now I can never tell." Roxane asks what's the matter, but Cyrano refuses to say.

At the precise moment when Cyrano and Roxane seem poised to express their true love for each other, fate conspires to keep them apart. The comedy keeps becoming more and more tragic.

A group of cadets walk up to the camp, carrying something. Cyrano whispers to Roxane that Christian "was" a great, noble man. Roxane realizes that the cadets are carrying Christian's body: he was struck by an enemy bullet, and will be dead soon. Roxane bursts into tears and embraces Christian. Christian whispers Roxane's name. Quickly, Cyrano runs up to Christian and quietly tells him that he told Roxane the truth—and Roxane still loves Christian. With this news, Christian closes his eyes and dies.

With Christian's death, Cyrano feels that he has failed to keep Christian safe, as per his promise to Roxane. In a touching example of Cyrano's loyalty, he tells a lie to ensure that Christian dies happy, saying that Roxane still loves him even after she learned the truth. Cyrano seemed to have had little respect for Christian earlier in the play, but by this point he is willing to make great sacrifices because of his loyalty to the man—even to the point of never telling Roxane the truth.

Roxane crouches over Christian's body while everyone else—except Cyrano—goes off to fight. Roxane says that Christian was a brilliant, beautiful, and wise man. Cyrano agrees. Count de Guiche calls out that French soldiers are bringing more provisions for the cadets. Roxane sees that Christian is holding a letter—the tear-stained letter Cyrano wrote for Roxane. Roxane sees that the letter is covered in Cyrano's own blood. As she notices this, she swoons and collapses, and Cyrano catches her.

In this scene, Rostand uses symbolism to clarify why Cyrano can't confess his feelings for Roxane. Cyrano's love for Roxane may be more sincere and passionate than Christian's, but the fact remains that Christian is dead, and he loved Roxane up to the moment of his death. In short, Christian's blood is more powerful and dignified than Cyrano's tears: if he were to confess his love now, Cyrano would be tarnishing the memory of a dead soldier, and ruining Roxane's love. As an honorable man, Cyrano refuses to do so. Rostand's timing of the events here is especially tragic.

Cyrano, still holding Roxane, calls for the Count de Guiche. He tells de Guiche to take care of Roxane, and passes her to the Count. With this, Cyrano walks away, saying, "Farewell, Roxane."

Cyrano is literally saying goodbye to Roxane, but he also knows that he'll never be as spiritually close with her as he was in the moment before Christian's death. De Guiche suddenly doesn't seem like a villain anymore, but rather a powerful man who loves Roxane and can protect her in her grief.

Cyrano draws his weapon and joins the battle. He shouts to Captain Carbon that he has to avenge his friend's death, as well as his own "dead" happiness. A great battle breaks out, and many cadets are killed or wounded.

This scene ironically parallels the finale of Act I: in that earlier act, Cyrano's optimistic love for Roxane inspired him to take on 100 opponents. Here, Cyrano's melancholy love—a love he now knows will never be realized—inspires him to fight even harder.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

The fifth act takes place in the year 1655 (fifteen years after the events of the previous act), and is set in a park outside a large convent in Paris. A group of nuns walks along, talking. Sister Claire claims to have seen Sister Martha eat some of a tart. Mother Marguerite, the superior of the nuns, says she's going to mention the incident to Cyrano. The nuns discuss how Cyrano has come to their convent to pray every single Saturday for the last decade. Fourteen years ago, Mother Marguerite notes, Cyrano's cousin Roxane came to the convent to mourn. Since then, Cyrano goes to the convent in an effort to bring drollness, wit, and humor to an otherwise sad place—despite the fact that he's not a faithful Catholic.

In a radical move, Rostand jumps ahead 15 years. This reminds us how successful Cyrano and Christian were in seducing Roxane: together, they created a fictional character, part-Christian, part-Cyrano, and Roxane fell so passionately in love with him that she continues to mourn his memory 15 years later. At first, it seems that nothing has changed in Cyrano: he's just as droll and sarcastic as ever, and still acting as a good friend to Roxane while keeping his feelings a secret.

As the nuns talk, Roxane appears, dressed in a widow's veil. The Count de Guiche walks beside her. The nuns note that Roxane's visitor, the Count, has been appointed the Duke of Grammont (a very important position). De Guiche sometimes visits Roxane, but it's been months since he was last at the convent.

It's surprising that de Guiche is present with Roxane, since he's arguably the reason that Christian died. De Guiche is arguably the most enigmatic presence in the play—it's up to the actor playing de Guiche to choose how to interpret his character. Fifteen years have passed, but Roxane's love is still so strong that she defines herself as a widow above everything else.

ACT 5, SCENE 2

De Guiche and Roxane talk as they walk through the convent. Roxane tells de Guiche that she's still faithful to Christian, her dead husband, but adds that she "forgives" de Guiche. She mentions that Cyrano comes to see her often.

Presumably, Roxane is saying that she forgives de Guiche for sending Christian into battle, indirectly causing his death. Roxane also clearly still doesn't understand that Cyrano is in love with her.

As Roxane and de Guiche talk, Le Bret arrives at the convent. Le Bret greets Roxane and tells her that Cyrano has become highly unpopular in the city. His witty insults have made him endless enemies, even though his skill with the sword allows him to defend himself at all times. De Guiche says—half to himself, half to Roxane and Le Bret—that he envies Cyrano. He says that when one is successful, like de Guiche himself, one's life is full of a vague unrest, and Cyrano need never experience this unrest.

In another ambiguous moment, de Guiche praises Cyrano for his rugged individualism. Cyrano may live in uncertainty, but uncertainty is thrilling and exhilarating—de Guiche, by contrast, lives a happy, prosperous life, but this life is dull and unexciting. These lines could be interpreted as de Guiche being sarcastic and patting himself on the back, or he could be sincere in his admiration for Cyrano (an admiration that we've already seen in Acts 2 and 3).

De Guiche pulls aside Le Bret and tells him a secret: there are those who plot to kill Cyrano. Since Cyrano is coming to the convent today, Le Bret says that he'll warn Cyrano.

We genuinely can't be sure if de Guiche is threatening Cyrano's life, or if he's warning Le Bret and actually trying to save Cyrano—or both (he may have arranged Cyrano's death, but now regrets it and tries to save him). There's no conclusive evidence either way, and it's up to the director and the actor playing de Guiche to decide.

The nuns then tell Roxane that Ragueneau has come to the convent. Roxane tells de Guiche and Le Bret that Cyrano has fallen on hard times—he's worked a number of odd jobs in recent years, even making wigs and teaching flute lessons to make ends meet.

It comes as a shock to learn that Cyrano has fallen on hard times—from the nuns' descriptions, we'd assumed that Cyrano was exactly the same. In part, Cyrano's declining fortunes are the result of his misery after Christian's death, as he lost hope of ever being able to tell Roxane the truth. But Cyrano's declining fortunes were also rather inevitable: he's always lived extravagantly, giving away whole purses of gold at a time, and "feeding" himself only on poetry. Sooner or later, this lifestyle was bound to catch up with him.

ACT 5, SCENE 3

Ragueneau arrives at the convent and explains to Le Bret that Cyrano has been attacked. While Cyrano was walking from a building, someone dropped a large piece of wood on his head. Cyrano is still alive, but he's bedridden, his head has been bound up, and he's slowly dying. Le Bret shouts that they need to go to Cyrano's home immediately to take care of him. They run out of the convent without saying goodbye to Roxane (who didn't hear any of this).

Each Act of Cyrano *is more tragic than the one that comes before. Cyrano is no longer the energetic comic hero we met 15 years before. He's become a broken man, hopeless and surrounded by enemies, and now he's dying as the result of a dishonorable surprise attack. As usual, there are more tragic misunderstandings, as Roxane doesn't know what's happened.*

ACT 5, SCENE 4

Roxane stands in her convent, noting that Cyrano should be here by now—he's always very punctual with his visits. Suddenly, a nun announces that Cyrano has arrived.

Even though Cyrano is dying, he still feels the need to visit Roxane as usual: his love and loyalty to Roxane is unfathomable.

ACT 5, SCENE 5

Cyrano de Bergerac approaches Roxane. He's very pale, and wears his hat low on his head so that Roxane can't see his wound. Roxane greets Cyrano happily and asks why he's late—this is the first time he's been late in fourteen years. Cyrano explains that he's being hounded by creditors: he's losing money, and can't pay back his debts. Sister Martha passes by Cyrano, shocked that he's so pale. Cyrano explains that he's only pale because he broke his fast.

The way Cyrano wears his hat low on his head tragically reminds us of the way Cyrano played the same trick on de Guiche 15 years before. This time, however, the "trick" is tragic, not comic, and yet it is still another kind of "panache"—hiding his weakness behind a hat and bravely putting on an act.

Roxane asks Cyrano if he has anything to report from the outside world. Cyrano gives Roxane news about the King of France and a ball that the Queen organized. As he speaks, his face gets whiter and whiter. Suddenly, he stops talking and closes his eyes. Roxane, terrified that Cyrano is hurt, tries to wake him up. After only a few moments, Cyrano opens his eyes, explaining that his old battle wounds from Arras sometimes cause him to lose consciousness for a few moments. Roxane nods and says that she has wounds of her own—the memory of Christian.

. In the first half of the play, dramatic irony produced comedy. Here, at the end of the play, dramatic irony produces pathos and tragedy. It's obvious to us that Cyrano is dying in front of our eyes, and yet this fact is equally inscrutable to Roxane and the nuns.

Roxane produces "Christian's" letter—the letter that was stained with blood on the day Christian died. Cyrano begs Roxane to let him read Christian's letter. Roxane agrees. Cyrano reads the letter out loud, barely looking at it. The letter talks about how Christian will die soon, but will always love Roxane. Roxane is amazed by the sound of Cyrano's voice as he reads—she senses that she's heard this tone of voice before, though she can't remember exactly where.

Even after 15 years, Cyrano still loves Roxane, despite the fact that he knows the love will never amount to anything. His enduring and passionate emotion is yet another quintessentially "Romantic" quality of Cyrano, as many could see a kind of heroism in loving unrequitedly and without hope for so long. Cyrano's loyalty to Christian is matched only by his love for Roxane.

Roxane then realizes the truth: it was Cyrano who wooed her fifteen years ago, using his wit and the power of his voice. Cyrano denies this, but Roxane knows she's right: she remembers hearing Cyrano's voice on the night "Christian" wooed her from outside her window. Before Cyrano can say more, Le Bret and Ragueneau enter.

The truth finally emerges, though Cyrano is still afraid to come out and say it even as he is about to die. His original feelings have only hardened over the last fifteen years—his love for Roxane, his guilt about Christian's death, and his self-hatred for his own appearance—and he still feels that there is no chance Roxane could ever love him, especially as Roxane is still in love with the fictional character that he and Christian created together.

ACT 5, SCENE 6

Le Bret and Ragueneau stare at Cyrano, shocked to see their friend in so much pain and suffering. They tell Roxane the truth: Cyrano was attacked that same day. Cyrano nods and takes off his hat, revealing the enormous bandage on his head. Le Bret and Ragueneau weep for their old friend.

It's now clear that Cyrano is revealing his feelings for Roxane because he knows he has nothing to lose. He's going to die soon, but he still can only hint at the truth in the most convoluted way. This moment is tragic in an especially complicated way for Roxane.

Cyrano turns to Roxane and tells her the truth: on the night that Christian appeared outside Roxane's window, it was he who wooed her from underneath the balcony. He knew he could never win Roxane himself, since his face was too ugly. His entire life, Cyrano explains, his voice getting fainter and fainter, he's been searching for love. Now that he's going to die, Cyrano will be able to converse with his heroes—people like Galileo and Socrates—even if he won't be with Roxane, the love of his life.

In this ironic, paradoxical monologue, Cyrano establishes a new definition of love. The love he'd spoken of before was eternal, Platonic, and unwavering. Here, he expresses a kind of love that doesn't *last forever: a love that he was brave enough to reveal only in his final moments of life. His love for Roxane was real, and her love for the Christian-that-was-Cyrano was real, but their love for each other never had a chance to become its own entity—it only exists in this fleeting moment before Cyrano dies.*

Cyrano, falling to the ground, tells Roxane that he wants her to mourn him at the same time that she mourns Christian. Roxane nods tearfully, promising to remember Cyrano forever.

Cyrano's desire to be remembered forever is entirely consonant with Cyrano's flamboyance, extravagance, and "panache." He's spent his entire life performing big, theatrical gestures that are designed to be enjoyed, talked about, and above all, remembered. Tellingly, we never get Roxane's real reaction to the truth—she only promises to mourn Cyrano as she mourns Christian. The "test" of whether or not her love was truly Platonic ends just it begins, and she never has a chance to process everything and decide (within the play's action) whether or not it was only Cyrano she loved this whole time—or to face the crushing realization that the man she has spent fifteen years mourning never really existed at all.

Suddenly, Cyrano jumps up from the ground, drawing his sword and vowing never to surrender to death without a fight. Roxane, Ragueneau, and Le Bret are extremely surprised. Cyrano boasts that, in spite of his ugly appearance, he has one thing that no one else has—one thing he'll take with him to heaven when he dies today. With these words, he falls to the ground again, into the arms of Le Bret and Ragueneau.

Rostand brings his play to a close in high Romantic fashion. Cyrano has spent his life fighting the people around him—a lifestyle that eventually gets him killed. And yet there's something extremely noble and impressive about Cyrano's behavior: he's so energetic and spirited that he refuses to give in to anything, even death.

Roxane leans over Cyrano, whose eyes are closed, and asks him what "thing" he's referring to—what he has that no one else does. Cyrano opens his eyes, looks at Roxane, and says, "My panache."

Cyrano's life is meteoric: bright and impressive, but short. And yet the legend of Cyrano will live on forever. Above all else, Cyrano will be remembered for his flamboyance, his cleverness, and his daring—in short, his panache. Since Rostand's play, the word "panache" has become common in the English language—in a way, then, Cyrano's panache has *become immortal, and he has indeed been remembered long after his death.*

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