

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

by Edmond Rostand



THE AUTHOR

Edmond Rostand (1868-1918) was born in Marseilles. His father, a political economist and poet, wanted his son to pursue the law, but young Edmond fell in love with the theater. He began to write plays in his early twenties, finding almost immediate success. By the time he wrote *Les Romanesques* (1894), and *La Princesse Lointaine* (1895), he was attracting the leading actors in Paris, including Sarah Bernhardt and Benoit Coquelin, to perform in his plays. His greatest triumph came with the publication of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 1897, which earned him the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur. Three years later, he became the youngest man ever inducted into the Academie Francaise. Illness forced him to leave Paris, and after 1900 his literary output declined. He died in 1918.

Cyrano de Bergerac, Rostand's most popular work, stands in stark contrast to the realism that dominated the late nineteenth-century theater. Ibsen, Zola, and the playwrights of Russia were producing stark, depressing dramas critical of the ills of the era. Rostand, instead, chose to return to the romantic past, setting his story during the reign of Louis XIII. Though similarities to Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*, set during the same era, are more than coincidental, Rostand based his plot on actual historical events and characters. Hercule Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-1655) was a poet, playwright, and notable member of the Guards. He was one of the pioneers of what today might be called science fiction, writing tales of trips to the sun and moon that were read and appreciated by notable satirists such as Jonathan Swift. The poet's friend Le Bret wrote his biography, and it is from this work that Rostand drew most of his characters. De Guiche, Roxane, Christian de Neuvillette, Ragueneau, and Carbon de Castel-Jaloux were real people, and the major events of the play really were part of their lives; Cyrano and de Guiche, who really was married to Richelieu's niece, fought in the siege of Arras during the Thirty Years' War, Roxane spent her years after Christian's death in a convent, and Cyrano died when a log was dropped on his head, probably by one of his many enemies. And yes, the real Cyrano did have a remarkably protuberant proboscis. Like Shakespeare, however, Rostand went well beyond his source. The liveliness and humor of the poetry, the sharp wit, and invented scenes like the duel in the theater and the seriocomic romance under Roxane's balcony have made the play an enduring favorite.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Cyrano de Bergerac – The protagonist is a flamboyant guardsman, a man with the soul of a romantic poet, the courage of a lion, and an enormous nose that distracts attention from his many virtues. He loves his beautiful cousin Roxane, but knows that his disfigurement stands between them.
- Christian de Neuvillette - A handsome but tongue-tied young guardsman beloved of Roxane, he enlists Cyrano to provide the words he needs to court her. They marry secretly, but Christian is killed in battle before the marriage can be consummated.
- Ligniere - A friend of Christian who introduces him to Paris society. His rude song angers de Guiche, who hires a hundred men to ambush and kill him. Cyrano, hearing of the plot, routs all of them singlehanded.
- Montfleury - A leading actor of the day, he is scorned and banned from the stage by Cyrano, who considers him a man of little talent.
- Ragueneau - A pastry cook and poet, he is a friend of Cyrano. The poets of Paris gather in his shop under his patronage. He later becomes Roxane's coachman.
- Lise - Ragueneau's wife, she is as much a down-to-earth realist as he is a romantic dreamer. Frustrated with her husband's lack of ambition, she runs away with a musketeer.
- Le Bret - Another friend of Cyrano, he remains faithful to the last and is present at Cyrano's death.
- Carbon de Castel-Jaloux - The captain of Cyrano's Guards regiment.
- Comte de Guiche - The villain of the piece, he is in love with Roxane, but because he is married to the niece of Cardinal Richelieu, he cannot wed her, but wants her to marry his friend Valvert instead. He is jealous of Cyrano, but eventually comes to respect him.
- Vicomte de Valvert - Friend of de Guiche and surrogate suitor to Roxane, he is defeated by Cyrano in a poetic duel in a theater.
- Roxane - Cyrano's orphan cousin, she is a lovely young girl who dotes on Christian because of his appearance, but loves him for the beauty of his language, which really comes from Cyrano. Only at the end of the play does she realize the source of the words that elicited her devotion.
- The Duenna - Roxane's chaperon, she is easily duped into being absent at critical times in her charge's romantic adventures.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Ah, no, young sir!
You are too simple. Why, you might have said -
Oh, a great many things! Mon dieu, why waste
Your opportunity? For example, thus:-
AGGRESSIVE: I, sir, if that nose were mine,
I'd have it amputated - on the spot!
FRIENDLY: How do you drink with such a nose?
You ought to have a cup made specially.
DESCRIPTIVE: 'Tis a rock - a crag - a cape -
A cape? say rather, a peninsula!
INQUISITIVE: What is that receptacle -
A razor-case or a portfolio?
KINDLY: Ah, do you love the little birds
So much that when they come and sing to you,
You give them this to perch on? INSOLENT:
Sir, when you smoke, the neighbors must suppose
Your chimney is on fire. CAUTIOUS: Take care -
A weight like that might make you topheavy.
THOUGHTFUL: Somebody fetch my parasol -
Those delicate colors fade so in the sun!
PEDANTIC: Does not Aristophanes
Mention a mythologic monster called
Hippocampelephantocamelos?
Surely we have here the original!
FAMILIAR: Well, old torchlight! Hang your hat
Over that chandelier - it hurts my eyes.
ELOQUENT: When it blows, the typhoon howls,
And the clouds darken. DRAMATIC: When it bleeds -
The Red Sea! ENTERPRISING: What a sign
For some perfumer! LYRIC: Hark - the horn
Of Roland calls to summon Charlemagne!-
SIMPLE: When do they unveil the monument?
RESPECTFUL: Sir, I recognize in you
A man of parts, a man of prominence -
RUSTIC: Hey? What? Call that a nose? Na na -
I be no fool like what you think I be -
That there's a blue cucumber! MILITARY:
Point against cavalry! PRACTICAL: Why not
A lottery with this as the grand prize?
Or - parodying Faustus in the play -
'Was this the nose that launched a thousand ships
And burned the topless towers of Ilium?'" (Cyrano, Act I)

“I carry my adornments on my soul.
I do not dress up like a popinjay;
But inwardly, I keep my daintiness.
I do not bear with me, by any chance,
An insult not yet washed away - a conscience
Yellow with unpurged bile - an honor frayed
To rags, a set of scruples badly worn.
I go caparisoned in gems unseen,
Trailing white plumes of freedom, garlanded
With my good name - no figure of a man,
But a soul clothed in shining armor, hung
With deeds for decorations, twirling - thus -
A bristling wit, and swinging at my side
Courage, and on the stones of this old town
Making the sharp truth ring, like golden spurs!” (Cyrano, Act I)

“There are things in this world
A man does well to carry to extremes.” (Cyrano, Act II)

“Yes, I have a sort
Of rough and ready soldier’s tongue. I know
That. But with any woman - paralyzed,
Speechless, dumb. I can only look at them.” (Christian, Act II)

“Yes, I do tremble . . . and I weep . . .
And I love you . . . and I am yours . . . and you
Have made me thus!” (Roxane, Act III)

“I have won what I have won -
The feast of love - and I am Lazarus!
Yet . . . I have something here that is mine now
And was not mine before I spoke the words
That won her - not for me! . . . Kissing my words
My words, upon your lips!” (Cyrano, Act III)

CHRISTIAN: “Shall I ruin your happiness, because
I have a cursed pretty face? That seems
Too unfair!”

CYRANO: “And am I to ruin yours
Because I happen to be born with power
To say what you - perhaps - feel?” (Act IV)

“I want her love
For the poor fool I am - or not at all!” (Christian, Act IV)

“For I am dead, and my love mourns for me
And does not know.” (Cyrano, Act IV)

“It is not violence I fear for him,
But solitude - poverty - old gray December,
Stealing on wolf’s feet, with a wolf’s green eyes,
Into his darkening room. Those braves yet
May strike our Swordsman down! Every day now,
He draws his belt up one hole; his poor nose
Looks like old ivory; he has one coat
Left - his old black serge.” (Le Bret, Act V)

“Yes - they know how to die. A little way
From the branch to the earth, a little fear
Of mingling with the common dust - and yet
They go down gracefully - a fall that seems
Like flying!” (Cyrano, Act V)

“Nothing! I did not finish my Gazette -
Saturday, twenty-sixth: An hour or so
Before dinner, Monsieur de Bergerac
Died, foully murdered.” (Cyrano, Act V)

“I never loved but one man in my life,
And I have lost him - twice.” (Roxane, Act V)

“I can see him there - he grins -
He is looking at my nose - that skeleton
- What’s that you say? Hopeless? - Why, very well! -
But a man does not fight merely to win!
No - no - better to know one fights in vain! . . .
You there - Who are you? A hundred against one -
I know them now, my ancient enemies -
Falsehood! . . . There! There! Prejudice - Compromise -
Cowardice - What’s that? No! Surrender? No!
Never - never! . . . Ah, you too, Vanity!
I knew you would overthrow me in the end -
No! I fight on! I fight on! I fight on!
Yes, all my laurels you have riven away
And all my roses; yet in spite of you,
There is one crown I bear away with me,
And to-night, when I enter before God,
My salute shall sweep all the stars away
From the blue threshold! One thing without stain,
Unspotted from the world, in spite of doom
Mine own! And that is . . . my white plume!” (Cyrano, Act V)

NOTES

Act I - The play begins in 1640 during the reign of Louis XIII. The setting for Act I is the Hotel de Bourgogne in Paris, where a theatrical production is being performed. Early arrivals joke, drink, and gamble while thieves prepare to do a booming business during the proceedings. Soon Christian, newly arrived in Paris, enters with his friend Ligniere, a poet who drinks far too much. He has fallen in love with a beautiful girl from afar, and wants Ligniere to tell him who she is. Before the girl appears, Ragueneau, a pastry cook and poet, enters. He and Ligniere express surprise that the great Cyrano de Bergerac has not yet put in an appearance, since the detestable actor Montfleury is to appear on stage and Cyrano has threatened to thrash him should he dare to take the stage for the next three weeks. Ligniere, Ragueneau, and other bystanders describe Cyrano to Christian as the bravest, most noble member of the Guards, a poet and musician without peer, but one who is exceedingly sensitive about his one disfigurement - an enormous nose. Christian then spots the girl of his dreams, who has just entered her box. Ligniere identifies her as Roxane, a refined, educated woman with no title but adequate fortune, and the cousin of the famous Cyrano. As they look on, the Comte de Guiche enters Roxane's box. Ligniere explains that he loves Roxane, but is married to the niece of Cardinal Richelieu, thus is trying to force her to marry his accommodating friend the Vicomte de Valvert. Christian impulsively prepares to leave the hall to find and challenge the interloper Valvert, but stops short when Roxane looks down from her box and makes eye contact with him. When de Guiche and Valvert descend to the main floor, Christian moves to throw his glove in Valvert's face, but grasps the hand of a cutpurse instead. The thief tells him that one hundred men are lying in wait to kill Ligniere that very night because of an uncomplimentary song he had written about de Guiche, so Christian drops everything to warn Ligniere, who by this time has left for a local tavern.

The play begins. Montfleury has the opening lines, and is interrupted by a voice; Cyrano has indeed come to the play. He orders Montfleury from the stage. The crowd becomes restive, wanting to see the play they have paid to see. Cyrano, however, warns them to keep away and offers to challenge all comers one at a time, but no one accepts the challenge. Cyrano says he will count to three, and before he can do so the fat actor disappears. When the audience complains, Cyrano responds that he has done a good deed by sparing them the torture of watching a bad play performed by a worse actor. He then throws a pouch of coins to the theater manager to allow him to return the ticket money to the audience members. As the crowd files out, a man begins to taunt Cyrano because Montfleury has a wealthy patron. Cyrano cares nothing for such niceties, but catches the man staring at his nose and picks a fight on the subject, ending with the man fleeing after Cyrano plants his boot in his nether regions. De Guiche and Valvert observe all this, and Valvert decides to take on the braggart. He calmly mentions that Cyrano's nose is rather large. The great guardsman then launches into a brilliant page-long discourse on creative ways of insulting him about his nose, in the process putting down Valvert for his pedestrian approach. Valvert, convinced that Cyrano is nothing but an old windbag, insults him openly, at which point Cyrano draws his sword. The two prepare to fight, and Cyrano announces that he will compose an extemporaneous ballad during the duel - three stanzas of eight lines each followed by a quatrain, on the last line of which Cyrano will end the duel. Matters proceed just as he has predicted. De Guiche and his friends slink out of the hall while Cyrano is proclaimed a hero.

When his friends gather around him, Cyrano admits that the bag of gold he gave to the theater owner was his entire monthly salary, leaving him with nothing on which to live, but to him, the grand gesture is of more value than food. After a little orange seller shares with him some of her wares, his friends ask him why he hates Montfleury so much. He admits that bad acting is not the

only reason. The obese performer had the nerve to turn his eyes toward Cyrano's secret love, the most beautiful woman in the world. They quickly guess that he means Roxane and ask him why he has never told her of his love. He argues that his nose must always come between them; how can one so ugly hope to win such beauty? As they talk, Roxane's duenna approaches with a message; Roxane wishes to meet with Cyrano at his earliest convenience. Cyrano, overwhelmed, tells her to meet him at Ragueneau's pastry shop the next morning. His excitement is such that he feels like he can take on an army singlehanded. As they leave the theater, a drunk Ligniere staggers up to him and asks for his protection from the hundred men who are lying in wait for him. Cyrano decides to take them all on by himself and invites his friends along to serve as an audience. Soon they are joined by the entire theater company, including the musicians. Cyrano warns them not to interfere or help him in any way as he marches confidently toward the encounter.

Act II - Act II takes place at Ragueneau's bakery shop the following morning. The proprietor is writing poetry while cooking is going on all around him. His wife Lise enters with a pile of paper to wrap the food to be sold, and Ragueneau is aghast that the paper contains the poems of his friends. She answers that, since the poems were left as payment for the food they ate, they should be able to get some good use out of them. When children come into the shop to buy pastries, he reluctantly wraps them in one of the poems, then, when Lise is not looking, gives them three more pastries in order to get the poem back.

Cyrano enters at six, an hour before Roxane is due but clearly anxious for her arrival. He asks the time every five minutes and debates whether to dare speak to her of his love or simply write down the words that fill his heart. Poets begin to arrive and speak of the wonders of the previous night; it seems some unknown person has put an entire crowd of ruffians to flight, killing eight of them in the process. Meanwhile, they devour the baker's stock. When Roxane and her duenna enter, Ragueneau takes the poets into another room so they can be alone. Cyrano loads the duenna down with pastries and sends her into the street to eat them.

Cyrano and Roxane reminisce briefly about the childhood days they spent together, how he would do anything for her and she would mother him whenever he hurt himself. She then notices the wound on his hand, received during the battle with a hundred thugs the night before. As she tends to his cut, she tells him that she loves someone who is unaware of her passion; she suspects that he loves her as well, but stays away because he fears rejection. He is, in fact, in Cyrano's own regiment. With every sentence his hopes soar higher, but when she says that the man she loves is beautiful, he knows she means someone other than himself. She confesses that the man in question is Christian de Neuvillette. Cyrano knows that he is newly arrived in Paris and wonders that Roxane could have fallen in love so quickly, especially since the two have never spoken. He asks her what she knows of the young man; he may be handsome, but what of his speech, his soul? Roxane admits that she fears for Christian's safety among the ruffians in the Guards, and begs Cyrano to take care of him. He, willing to do anything to please her, agrees.

After Roxane leaves, the captain of Cyrano's regiment arrives with his guardsmen and they gather around the conquering hero. They are soon followed by hordes of townsmen, poets, and newspaper reporters wanting to bask in the reflected glow of the previous night's victory. De Guiche soon follows and also congratulates Cyrano. He offers him a position in his retinue and sweetens the pot by suggesting that his uncle, Cardinal Richelieu, might be willing to promote a play Cyrano has recently written. Cyrano is tempted, but when he hears that Richelieu will edit and censor the text, he refuses. A cadet enters with hats skewered on a sword - the spoils of the previous night's engagement. De Guiche admits that he hired the hundred men to punish Ligniere. Cyrano dumps

the hats at de Guiche's feet. Barely able to control himself, de Guiche asks Cyrano if he has ever read *Don Quixote*. Cyrano responds that he has, and that he identifies strongly with the protagonist; de Guiche then warns him to beware tilting at windmills. After de Guiche leaves, Le Bret takes Cyrano to task for ruining every chance that Fate places before him. He responds that he cannot grovel for the favor of others, but would prefer to be his own man no matter what the world may think of him. He would rather have honestly-won enemies than false friends. Le Bret, however, sees through his bravado, realizing that his response is really an expression of his disappointment at finding that Roxane loves not him, but Christian de Neuvillette.

Christian then enters the shop, and the Gascon cadets immediately begin working on the northerner, who is not one of their countrymen, warning him that the merest mention of anything relating to the nose in Cyrano's presence could lead to his demise. They then demand Cyrano's account of the previous night's battle. He has barely begun his tale, however, when Christian interrupts the story with repeated and pointed references to a certain obvious protuberance. The cadets anticipate swift vengeance on the newcomer, but Cyrano holds his temper with great difficulty, realizing that Christian is the very man Roxane has asked him to protect. He finally orders everyone out of the room so he can be alone with Christian. When the others leave, expecting the worst, Cyrano embraces Christian and tells him that he is Roxane's cousin and that she has confessed her love to him. Christian then begs Cyrano's forgiveness, while Cyrano praises his courage. Cyrano then tells him that Roxane expects a letter from him. Christian freezes up, insisting that he is not a man of words, but of action, and cannot possibly please Roxane with a letter. Cyrano then proposes that he write the letters for Christian, winning Roxane's love by combining his soul and Christian's body. Christian is at first reluctant, knowing that he will be in trouble if he ever finds himself alone with Roxane, but finally agrees because he sees no alternative. Cyrano then pulls the completed letter from his pocket that he had written prior to Roxane's arrival at the bakery, assuring Christian that his poetry will fit his love like a glove. The cadets able to wait no longer, burst in expecting to find carnage, and instead find the two men embracing. When one of them makes bold to suggest that Cyrano has "turned the other nostril," however, he is flattened for his troubles, and general joy erupts because Cyrano is his old self again.

Act III - Act III takes place outside the home of Roxane. Ragueneau is speaking to Roxane's duenna, bemoaning the fact that his wife has run off with a musketeer. He tried to hang himself, but Cyrano had cut him down and gotten him a job as Roxane's steward. Cyrano soon appears with two pages and their musical instruments. They play so badly, however, that he orders them to go serenade Montfleury instead. Cyrano inquires about their "friend with the great soul." Roxane is clearly enamored of Christian because of the beauty of the letters he writes to her. Cyrano draws her out, loving but at the same time suffering to hear his verses praised in the name of another. Roxane has obviously memorized them word for word.

De Guiche then arrives, and the duenna quickly pushes Cyrano into the house so the two will not meet. He announces that he must leave the next day. He has been made a colonel in the Guards, commanding the regiment to which Christian and Cyrano belong, which is to besiege the town of Arras. She fears for Christian's life and knows that de Guiche intends to avenge himself on Cyrano. She flirts with him, suggesting that the best way he can get revenge on Cyrano is to leave him and his entire regiment in Paris, cooling their heels while others win glory on the battlefield. He agrees, but only on condition that she meet him that night at the Capuchin monastery.

After they leave, Christian arrives and Cyrano pulls him aside and tells him that he needs to memorize his lines for that night. Christian refuses, insisting that he will speak for himself for a

change. Cyrano submits, knowing that the conversation is unlikely to go well, and indeed it does not. Christian, sitting next to Roxane on a bench, can say little more than “I love you.” She demands that he elaborate, but he cannot find the words. She finally goes into the house in frustration, and Christian goes to Cyrano and begs for his help. Roxane appears on her balcony, and Cyrano tells Christian to stand where she can see him while Cyrano whispers words for him to speak. Soon Roxane is entranced by the beautiful poetry that flows from Christian’s lips. When she wonders at his halting speech, Cyrano takes over, mimicking Christian’s voice as he speaks his beautiful words of love. Roxane wants to come down to be with him, but Cyrano quickly dissuades her while cherishing this one opportunity to speak what is in his heart to the woman he loves so dearly. Christian interrupts, asking Roxane for a kiss. Cyrano tries to silence him, but Roxane hears their quarrel and wonders why Christian is rebuking himself. A Capuchin passes, looking for Roxane, but Cyrano sends him in the wrong direction. Recognizing that Christian will get his kiss eventually, Cyrano convinces himself that it might as well occur through his agency. He tells Christian to climb the vines onto the balcony, and the two enjoy their kiss, which Cyrano experiences vicariously.

The Capuchin then returns with a letter, telling Roxane that de Guiche awaits her at the convent. When she reads the letter aloud, however, she presents it as an order for the monk to marry her and Christian immediately, and promises him a reward of 120 pistoles if he does so. She then warns Cyrano to guard against de Guiche’s arrival while the wedding is performed. When de Guiche does appear, Cyrano swings down from the balcony on a vine and falls flat on his face. Pretending to be mad, he claims to have fallen from the moon. He then launches into a long discourse about the nature of the constellations and tells de Guiche that he has discovered six ways to launch himself into space, which he then enumerates. Once he has stalled for fifteen minutes, he assumes his own voice and announces that de Guiche is too late, since Roxane and Christian are now married. De Guiche complements Cyrano’s cleverness in spite of himself, then tells the men to report for duty immediately. Roxane perceives that he never intended to keep his bargain with her, since he has the orders calling up the regiment in his pocket. She begs Cyrano to watch over Christian, taking care of him and not letting him do anything dangerous. He says he will do his best, but cannot promise such things in the heat of battle. She also makes him promise to have Christian write every day; this a promise he is in no wise reluctant to give.

Act IV - The setting for Act IV is the Guards post outside the city of Arras. The besieging army is exhausted and starving. At dawn, Cyrano returns to camp. He has been slipping through enemy lines at the risk of his life each night to send a letter from Christian to Roxane, which of course he has written himself, without Christian’s knowledge. The cadets awake, complaining of hunger, and Cyrano tries to cheer them up. De Guiche arrives and begins to boast of his military prowess. He tells of a recent victory where he cast aside his white scarf - his badge of office - in order to escape among his men, then rallied them to counterattack and gain the day. Cyrano scoffs that a true leader would never cast off his white plume, but wear it proudly and courageously in the heat of battle. He even offers to wear de Guiche’s scarf himself in the next charge. When de Guiche accuses him of an idle boast because the scarf has been abandoned in a field raked with artillery fire, Cyrano pulls it from his pocket. De Guiche then announces that the Spaniards will throw the full weight of their forces against Cyrano’s company while the rest of the French army goes to fetch much-needed provisions. In other words, he is finally getting his revenge against Cyrano by condemning him and his companions to almost certain death. Christian, as aware of the danger as the rest, asks Cyrano

about a final farewell to Roxane. Cyrano has already written it, and Christian takes it and puts it in his pocket.

To the astonishment of all, a coach drives up, and from it emerges none other than Roxane herself! She has been driven by Ragueneau through the Spanish lines, smiling and batting her eyes at any Hidalgo who challenges her and telling him that she was going to see her lover. The men try to convince her to leave before the coming battle, but she will hear none of it, determined if necessary to die with the man who had written such beautiful letters to her every day since his departure. She also has brought food with her to feed the hungry soldiers. They suddenly are inspired, taking her handkerchief as their battle flag. When de Guiche returns, they quickly hide the food and wine, but when he tells them he intends to stay and die with them, the food reappears.

In the confusion and gaiety, Cyrano pulls Christian aside and tells him of the daily letters he has written to Roxane. When Roxane reveals that she undertook her dangerous journey because of the letters, begging forgiveness for being so shallow as to be attracted to Christian's appearance and insisting that she would love him even if he were ugly, he realizes that she does not love him, but Cyrano instead, and that Cyrano loves her. He goes to Cyrano and urges him to tell Roxane everything, letting her choose between them. He refuses, having no desire to reveal his subterfuge and ruin Roxane and Christian's marriage, but Christian is even willing to have the secret marriage annulled if Roxane chooses Cyrano instead. On Christian's insistence, Cyrano prepares to tell Roxane the truth, especially after she assures him that she would love the writer of the letters even if he were grotesque. Before he can get the words out, however, gunfire is heard in the background, and a group of cadets enter bearing the dying Christian de Neuvillette, who has been struck in the first volley. Just before he dies, Cyrano whispers to Christian that Roxane had chosen him. Roxane then collapses on the body and draws from the dead man's pocket his final letter - the last one written by Cyrano. Ragueneau and de Guiche carry Roxane to the carriage and drive off as the heat of battle draws ever closer. Cyrano seizes the lance with Roxane's handkerchief affixed to the tip and leads a final charge against the Spanish forces.

Act V - Fifteen years have now passed. It is 1655, and Roxane has for many years been living in the convent of the Ladies of the Cross in Paris. Cyrano visits the convent every Saturday, making the nuns laugh and bringing a smile to the sorrowful countenance of Roxane, who continues to mourn for her lost love. As the women await Cyrano's visit, they talk about his merry jests, but the Mother Superior tells them that he is very poor, though because of his pride he will allow no one to help him. Roxane enters on de Guiche's arm; he has come for one of his infrequent visits. He is now an important government official. Le Bret appears as well, and they discuss Cyrano's sad plight. He continues to strike out against cant and hypocrisy, making many enemies in the process, but all fear to strike out at him because of his still-renowned swordsmanship, though some have hinted that he could yet meet an untimely end. At that moment Ragueneau hurries in, reporting that, as Cyrano left his home to come to the convent, a lackey had dropped a log on his head; could this have been more than an accident?

Cyrano then arrives, late for the first time in more than a decade. His head is bandaged and he can hardly walk without assistance. One of the nuns helps him to his usual chair under a tree. As he relates the news and gossip of the week, he weakens noticeably. He pauses to ask Roxane if he might read Christian's final letter to her, which she has kept in a pouch near her heart. She gives it to him, and he begins to read. Darkness falls, and he continues reading, having no need to look at the words he had written fifteen years before. Finally Roxane realizes the truth - that the letter-writer, the voice beneath the balcony, the great soul who had loved her beyond measure had always

been Cyrano. Despite his denials, she now knows all. Ragueneau and Le Bret rush in, having been searching for Cyrano. Cyrano asks Ragueneau about his writing, but he says he has given it up, since he now lights the candles for Moliere's performances. He reports that Moliere has stolen one of Cyrano's best scenes, and Cyrano responds that such is the story of his life; he pens the words, and others get the glory - and the kiss. Cyrano gradually slides into delirium, but recovers momentarily and asks to stand under the tree. He draws his sword and speaks his last words, with Roxane's kiss on his forehead and his white plume held high to the end.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In Act II of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the protagonist admits that he identifies with the hero of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. In what ways are the two similar? Consider their romanticism, their values, and their attitudes toward love in answering the question. Do the authors of the works view the two men in the same way, or do they seek to portray them differently? Discuss the lessons the authors seek to draw from the lives of their heroes.
2. In the musical *Man of La Mancha*, Don Quixote sings his valedictory in the song *The Impossible Dream*. To what extent do the words of this song also fit the protagonist of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*? Use incidents and quotations from the play in connection with lines from the song to support your analysis.
3. Compare and contrast the balcony scenes in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Which, in your opinion, displays a greater depth of love? Why do you think so? Be sure to cite quotations from both plays in your answer.
4. Compare and contrast the language in the balcony scenes in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Which in your opinion expresses love more eloquently? Why do you think so? Pay attention to matters such as depth of emotion and imagery in your analysis.
5. Roxane's duenna in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Juliet's nurse in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* are minor characters that nonetheless stand out in the minds of the audience. Compare and contrast the two, considering the roles they play in the plots, their relationships to the girls they are supposed to be watching, and the ways in which they become vehicles for humor in the hands of the playwrights.
6. Two great French swashbucklers, Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*, are set during the reign of Louis XIII in the first half of the seventeenth century, when Cardinal Richelieu dominated French politics. Compare and contrast the two stories, considering the portrayals of the courage of the musketeers, the views of love and romance, and the use of humor in the tales. To what extent did Rostand, who wrote his play fifty years after Dumas' novel, borrow from his famous predecessor?

7. Compare and contrast the scene at the siege of Arras in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and the one at the siege of La Rochelle in Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*. How do both scenes serve to bring out important qualities in the central characters in the two stories? How do they contribute to later developments in the two plots?
8. A *foil* is a character who brings out important qualities in another one by contrast. Who do you think serves as the most effective foil for the protagonist in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*? Probably the best candidates are Christian and de Guiche. Which do you think is the better choice? Defend your selection, being sure to argue why your choice is better than the other possibility.
9. Discuss the concept of honor presented in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. What does the playwright believe to be the most important characteristics of an honorable man? Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your answer with details from the play.
10. Discuss the view of the power of art presented in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Give attention not only to the protagonist, but also to secondary figures such as Ragueneau and Montfleury. What role does the playwright believe art should play in the life of the individual and in society? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Support your answer with specifics from the play.
11. In Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, words have great power - they elicit love and hatred, give life and lead to death. Compare Rostand's portrayal of the power of words with the way the concept is used in Scripture. Be sure to incorporate passages like John 1 and James 3 in your analysis.
12. Discuss the differences among sexual lust, physical attraction, and romantic love as they are portrayed in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Which characters most fully represent each one? How does Roxane's transition from the second to the third show development in her character and help to advance the plot?
13. In what sense do Roxane's two chief suitors, Cyrano and Christian, serve as two parts of the romantic ideal presented by the author in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*? If the best qualities of the two were combined, would the result be an ideal hero? Why or why not? What would be the result if the weaknesses of the two men were combined instead?
14. According to I Samuel 16:7, "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." To what extent is Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* a commentary on the relative values of outer and inner beauty? Does the playwright's treatment of the issue correspond with that found in Scripture? Why or why not?
15. Discuss the quality of selflessness as it is portrayed in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Choose three characters who illustrate the admirable nature of selflessness, either by demonstrating it or by displaying its opposite. Be sure to evaluate the playwright's concept of selflessness in the light of the Bible's teaching on the subject.

16. In Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the protagonist is presented as a man of impeccable character with a high sense of honor and morality, yet he is willing to deceive Roxane in order to bring her and Christian together. What are the consequences of his deception for all three of the main characters? What does this indicate about the true nature of the merciful or benevolent lie? Be sure to use details from the play and Scripture references to develop your analysis.
17. Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* contains two levels of cultural critique - the protagonist criticizes the culture of seventeenth-century France, while the playwright points out the weaknesses of his own late nineteenth-century society. What are the most important elements of these cultural critiques? Be sure to distinguish between aspects of Cyrano's world and those of the author, and use specific incidents, characters, and quotations from the play to support your analysis.
18. In Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the protagonist possesses a strange mixture of abundant self-confidence and lack of self-esteem, each relating to different parts of who he is as a person. In your opinion, is his braggadocio merely a cover for his deep sense of inadequacy, or does his combination of qualities accurately reflect the psychology of most people?
19. Discuss the symbolic significance of the white plume in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Be sure to include consideration of the scene during the siege of Arras as well as the play's closing lines.
20. Given the nature of the ending of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, would you consider the play to be more of a tragedy or a comedy? Why? Support your conclusion with details from the play, keeping in mind the classical definition of the two theatrical genres.
21. Analyze the character of Roxane in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Does the playwright portray her as a real woman, worthy of the love of men both good and evil, or is she instead some ill-defined ideal of womanhood? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
22. The Comte de Guiche in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* is much more than a stock villain. Though he appears as an evil, immoral schemer in the early part of the play, he eventually emerges as a noble and admirable character. What contributes to these changes? Do you find them credible? Does the play suffer in its latter part in the absence of a believable villain? Why or why not?
23. In Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, would you consider the protagonist a success or a failure? Support your conclusion with details from the play, including both events and quotations.
24. Discuss the variations in tone established by Edmond Rostand in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Choose three scenes with different tones and describe how the playwright creates the emotional coloring transmitted to the audience.

25. Discuss the use of irony in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Consider dramatic irony, when the audience knows something the characters don't know or when one character knows the meaning of a statement of which others are ignorant, and verbal irony, when a statement signifies something other than its surface meaning. Explain how the playwright uses irony for humor as well as to convey the central themes of the play. Cite specific examples in your analysis.
26. In the scene at the end of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the dying Cyrano says he hopes to meet three men in Paradise: Socrates, Galileo, and Copernicus. Why does he identify so strongly with these three men? Use details from the play to draw parallels between the protagonist and these men whom he admires so much.
27. The theme of love dominates Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, but for each of the central characters, that love ultimately remains unfulfilled. Is it true that "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all"? How would Cyrano, Christian, and Roxane evaluate this couplet from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*? Did the playwright believe it to be true? Support your arguments with details, including quotations, from the play.
28. In Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, one of the themes is that people should not be judged on the basis of appearances, but is not Cyrano guilty of doing exactly that in relationship to himself? To what extent is he responsible for the fact that he never gets to fulfill his love for Roxane?
29. Honesty is seen as a great virtue in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, yet the central characters all engage in some form of deception, albeit for supposedly good motives. On the other hand, the villain, Comte de Guiche is unfailingly honest about his evil motives and intentions. Might one legitimately argue that de Guiche is the most honest character in the play? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the script.
30. Some critics have argued that, in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Roxane loves a person who does not exist, since the man she loves is a conflation of Christian and Cyrano. Is this a valid judgment? Could one claim that she loves neither man, but instead is attached to an unreachable ideal as much as Cyrano himself appears to be? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
31. In Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, what can you conclude about Roxane because of her inability to love Christian for who he is unless he can express his love in flowery language? Does this make her any less shallow than she is at the beginning when she loves him because of his looks? Evaluate the quality of Roxane's love for Christian. Does she ever understand what true love is?
32. In Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, analyze the protagonist's motivation for refusing to reveal the truth to Roxane after Christian's death. Was his fifteen-year deception justified? Why did he break his silence when he knew he was dying?

33. The subject of revenge is treated with some complexity in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Many characters take revenge on others for a variety of reasons. Choose three examples of vengeance in the play and evaluate them. Are any of them justifiable? What separates those that are from those that are not? Base your conclusions on both the moral universe of the play and the teachings of Scripture on the subject.
34. Though Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* is known for its brilliant wordplay as well as its swordplay, something is lost in even the best of translations. A good example of this is the play on words found in the protagonist's dying speech. The word translated "white plume" is the French *panache*. Consider the double meaning of Cyrano's dying words. How does this enrich your understanding of the man and what he valued most at his death?
35. Most popular drama of the late nineteenth century was naturalistic, focusing on the depressing realities of life and offering little hope for escape from the ugliness to which all are inevitably partakers. In the midst of this pessimistic view of the world, no one expected a throwback to early nineteenth-century Romanticism like Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* to succeed, but in fact it became an immediate hit. In your opinion, was this simply because people appreciated an opportunity to escape from life's harsh realities, or because the affirmation of honor, courage, beauty, and love as legitimate objects of pursuit struck a chord in the jaded French population? To what would you ascribe the play's ongoing popularity up to the present day?
36. One of the qualities that makes the protagonist of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* admirable is the extent to which he is willing to stand against the fads and fashions of the society in which he lives. Discuss different ways in which this is true and explain why these contribute to the audience's admiration for the character. Are there any ways in which Cyrano is a creature of his time and place? Do these characteristics make him less admirable? Why or why not?
37. Many adventure stories center on a naive young man who is guided to maturity by a colorful and experienced rogue. Among such stories are Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Compare and contrast the two in terms of the relationships between the principals and the roles they play in the stories. Which of the young men is more admirable? Which of the older characters? Why do you think so? Support your arguments with details from both the novel and the play.