



Cyrano.

Roxane.

Christian.

Edmond Rostand

Cyrano de Bergerac

translated by Lowell Bair

CHARACTERS

CYRANO DE BERGERAC [sē'rə nō' də bur'zhə rak']: soldier, philosopher, and poet; famous for his wit, great courage, and large nose

CHRISTIAN DE NEUVILLETTE [krēs'tē an' də nu'vē yet']: handsome young soldier; inept at expressing himself

MAGDELEINE ROBIN [mad'lin rō ban'], known as **ROXANE** [roks an']: beautiful, rich, and cultured cousin of Cyrano; loved by both Cyrano and Christian

Friends of Cyrano

LIGNIÈRE [lē nyār']: mischievous poet

RAGUENEAU [ra'gə nō']: poet and pastrycook

LISE [lēz]: wife of Ragueneau

LE BRET [lə brā']: officer in Cyrano's regiment

CARBON DE CASTEL-JALOUX [kār bon' də kas tel' zha lōō']: captain of Cyrano's regiment

Opponents of Cyrano

COUNT DE GUICHE [də gēsh']: ambitious nobleman and military commander; in love with Roxane

VISCOUNT DE VALVERT [vī'kount də val vār']: follower of de Guiche; wooer of Roxane

MONTFLEURY [mon'flu rē']: fat, untalented actor



Other named characters (*in order of their appearance*)

CUIGY [kwē zhē']: officer in Cyrano's regiment

BRISSAILLE [brē sī']: officer in Cyrano's regiment

BELLEROSE [bel rōz']: theater manager

THE DUENNA [dwā'nə]: Roxane's chaperone, or companion

BERTRANDOU [bār'tron dōō']: fife-player

SISTER MARTHE [mār'tə]: nun of the Ladies of the Cross Convent

MOTHER MARGUERITE DE JESUS [mār'gə rēt' də zhā'zōō]: Mother Superior of the Convent

SISTER CLAIRE: nun of the Convent

Others (*in order of their appearance*)

A DOORKEEPER

SEVERAL CAVALIERS

SEVERAL PAGES

AN ORANGE SELLER

SEVERAL MARQUIS [mār kē']

A CROWD OF THEATER-GOERS

A LAMPLIGHTER

A PICKPOCKET

A MEDDLER

ACTORS

ACTRESSES

PASTRYCOOKS

A MUSKETEER

SEVERAL POETS

THE CADETS OF GASCOYNE

TWO MUSICIANS

A CAPUCHIN [kap'yə shin] PRIEST

A SPANISH OFFICER

SEVERAL NUNS

ACT I

The auditorium of the Hôtel de Bourgogne [õ tel' də bõõr gõ'nyə] in Paris in 1640.

[It resembles an indoor tennis court, decorated and fitted out for theatrical performances. As the curtain rises, the auditorium is in semi-darkness and still empty. The chandeliers have been lowered to the floor and are waiting to be lighted. A tumult of voices is heard from outside the door; then a CAVALIER enters abruptly, followed by an angry DOORKEEPER.]

THE DOORKEEPER. *[Pursuing him.]* Stop! You haven't paid your fifteen sols.¹

THE CAVALIER. I don't have to pay!

THE DOORKEEPER. Why not?

THE CAVALIER. I'm a light-horseman² of the King's Household.

THE DOORKEEPER. *[To another CAVALIER who has just entered.]* And you?

SECOND CAVALIER. I don't have to pay either.

THE DOORKEEPER. But . . .

SECOND CAVALIER. I'm a musketeer.³

FIRST CAVALIER. *[To the second.]* The play doesn't begin till two o'clock and the floor is empty. Let's have a little fencing practice. *[They fence with the foils they have brought.]*

[A BAND OF PAGES enters.]

THE DOORKEEPER. *[Sternly, to the PAGES.]* Behave yourselves, boys! No pranks!

FIRST PAGE. *[With wounded dignity.]* Oh, sir, how can you even suspect such a thing? *[With animation, to the SECOND PAGE, as soon as the*

DOORKEEPER *has turned his back.]* Do you have your string?

SECOND PAGE. Yes, and my fishhook.

FIRST PAGE. Good. We'll fish for wigs when we're up there.

A VOICE FROM THE UPPER GALLERY. Light the chandeliers!

A PAGE. *[On the floor.]* Ah, here's the refreshment girl!

THE REFRESHMENT GIRL. *[Appearing behind the refreshment table.]* Oranges, milk, raspberry syrup, cider. . . .

[Commotion at the door.]

A MARQUIS.⁴ *[Seeing that the theater is half empty.]* What's this? We've arrived like tradesmen, without disturbing people, without stepping on their feet? What a shameful way to make an entrance! *[Finds himself in front of some other noblemen who have entered shortly before.]* Cuigy!⁵ Brissaille!⁶ *[They embrace enthusiastically.]*

CUIGY. Ah, the faithful are here! Yes, it's true: we've come before the candles. . . .

THE MARQUIS. No, don't talk about it! I'm so annoyed. . . .

ANOTHER MARQUIS. Cheer up, Marquis, here comes the lighter!

THE CROWD. *[Greeting the entrance of the LIGHTER.]* Ah! . . .

[LIGNIÈRE⁷ and CHRISTIAN DE NEUVILLETTE⁸ enter.]

4. Marquis [mār kē']: nobleman who ranks below a duke and above a count.

5. Cuigy [kwē zhē']

6. Brissaille [brē sī']

7. Lignière [lē nyār']

8. Christian de Neuvillette [krēs'tē an' də nu've'yet']

1. sols: The sol, or sou, is a French coin no longer in use. It was worth about one cent.

2. light-horseman: cavalry soldier who carries light arms.

3. musketeer: soldier armed with a musket.

arm in arm. LIGNIÈRE is rather disheveled. CHRISTIAN is elegantly dressed, but in a somewhat outmoded style. He seems preoccupied, and looks up at the boxes.]

CUIGY. Lignière!

LIGNIÈRE. [To CHRISTIAN.] Shall I introduce you? [CHRISTIAN nods.] Baron de Neuville. [They bow.]

THE CROWD. [Acclaiming the raising of the first lighted chandelier.] Ah!

CUIGY. [To BRISSAILLE, looking at CHRISTIAN.] He has a charming face!

LIGNIÈRE. [Introducing them to CHRISTIAN.] Messieurs⁹ de Cuigy, de Brissaille. . . .

CHRISTIAN. [Bowing.] Delighted to meet you, gentlemen.

LIGNIÈRE. [To CUIGY.] Monsieur de Neuville has just arrived from Touraine.¹⁰

CHRISTIAN. Yes, I've been in Paris only three weeks. I'm entering the Guards tomorrow, as a Cadet.¹¹

CUIGY. [To CHRISTIAN, pointing to the auditorium, which is beginning to fill.] People are arriving.

CHRISTIAN. Yes, in droves!

FIRST MARQUIS. All of fashionable society is here! Look, our lady intellectuals are taking their places.

LIGNIÈRE. [Taking CHRISTIAN aside.] My friend, I came with you to help you, but since the lady isn't here—

CHRISTIAN. [Imploringly.] No, stay! You know

9. Messieurs [mā syu']: sirs or gentlemen; plural for *Monsieur* [mō syu'], which means "Mister."

10. Touraine [tōō ren']: region of central France.

11. Cadet: nobleman who served as a common soldier to gain experience and eventually earn a commission as an officer.

everyone at court and in the city: you'll be able to tell me the name of the lady for whom I'm dying of love. I'm afraid she may be coquettish and refined. I don't dare to speak to her, because I have no wit. I don't know how to use the elegant language that's in style nowadays. I'm only a soldier, a shy soldier. . . . She always sits in that box—there, on the right. It's still empty. . . .

LIGNIÈRE. Aha! I'll stay a little longer, since you insist.

VOICES FROM THE CROWD. [Greeting the entrance of a plump, jolly-looking little man.] Ah, Ragueneau!¹²

LIGNIÈRE. [To CHRISTIAN.] There's Ragueneau, the great baker.

RAGUENEAU. [Dressed like a pastry cook in his Sunday best, hurrying toward LIGNIÈRE.] Sir, have you seen Monsieur de Cyrano?

LIGNIÈRE. [Introducing RAGUENEAU to CHRISTIAN.] This is Ragueneau, the pastry cook of actors and poets!

RAGUENEAU. [Embarrassed.] You honor me too highly.

LIGNIÈRE. Not at all! You're a patron of the arts!

RAGUENEAU. Poets do come to my shop. . . .

LIGNIÈRE. To buy on credit. And you yourself are a talented poet.

RAGUENEAU. So I've been told.

LIGNIÈRE. You're madly in love with poetry!

RAGUENEAU. It's true that for an ode. . . .

LIGNIÈRE. You give a tart.

RAGUENEAU. Only a little one, if it's a short ode.

LIGNIÈRE. You love the theater, too, don't you?

RAGUENEAU. I adore it.

12. Ragueneau [ra'gə nō']

LIGNIÈRE. You pay for your theater tickets with pastry! Tell me, just between ourselves, how much did you pay this time?

RAGUENEAU. Four custard tarts and fifteen cream puffs. [*Looks all around.*] Monsieur de Cyrano isn't here? I'm surprised.

LIGNIÈRE. Why?

RAGUENEAU. Montfleury¹³ is in the play!

LIGNIÈRE. Yes, that walking barrel will play the part of Phaedo¹⁴ today. But what does it matter to Cyrano?

RAGUENEAU. Haven't you heard? He took a dislike to Montfleury and ordered him not to appear on the stage for a month.

LIGNIÈRE. Well, what of it?

RAGUENEAU. Ah, that's what I've come to see!

FIRST MARQUIS. Who is this Cyrano?

CUIGY. He's a Cadet in the Guards. [*Points to a gentleman who is walking back and forth as though looking for someone.*] But his friend Le Bret¹⁵ can tell you. . . . [*Calls him.*] Le Bret! [*LE BRET comes over to them.*] You're looking for Bergerac?

LE BRET. Yes, and I'm worried. . . .

CUIGY. He's an extraordinary man, isn't he?

LE BRET. [*Affectionately.*] The most delightful man under the sun!

RAGUENEAU. A poet!

CUIGY. A swordsman!

BRISSAILLE. A scientist!

LE BRET. A musician!

LIGNIÈRE. And what an uncommon appearance!

13. Montfleury [mon'flu rē']: seventeenth-century French actor.

14. Phaedo [fā dō']

15. Le Bret [lə brā']

RAGUENEAU. Odd, impetuous, brash, and outlandish as he is, proudest of all the thin-skinned swaggerers lovingly spawned by Gascony,¹⁶ I think he would have given the late Jacques Callot¹⁷ a wild swashbuckler¹⁸ to place among his portraits. With his triple-plumed hat, his billowing doublet,¹⁹ and his cape majestically held out behind by a sword, he carries his nose above a punchinello ruff,²⁰ a nose that . . . Ah, gentlemen, what a nose! Those who see it pass by can't help exclaiming, "No, it can't be true!" Then they smile and say, "He'll soon take it off." But Monsieur de Bergerac never takes it off.

LE BRET. [*Nodding.*] He keeps it on—and runs his sword through anyone who looks at it too closely.

FIRST MARQUIS. [*Sbrugging.*] He won't come.

RAGUENEAU. He will! I'll bet you a chicken à la Ragueneau!

FIRST MARQUIS. [*Laughing.*] I'll take that bet!

[*Murmurs of admiration from the crowd: ROXANE²¹ has just appeared in her box. She sits at the front of it, her DUENNA²² sits at the rear. CHRISTIAN, occupied in paying the REFRESHMENT GIRL, has not yet seen her.*]

SECOND MARQUIS. [*With little cries.*] Gentlemen, she's terrifically lovely!

FIRST MARQUIS. Skin like a peach, smiling with strawberry lips!

16. Gascony: a region of southwestern France; Gascons were famous for their boastfulness.

17. Jacques Callot [zhak ka lō']: French artist (1592–1635) who was famous for his portraits of colorful figures, especially from the theater.

18. swashbuckler: flamboyant soldier or adventurer.

19. doublet: close-fitting, waist-length jacket.

20. punchinello [pun'chə nel'ō] ruff: A punchinello is a grotesque, humpbacked character in an Italian puppet show; his costume includes a ruff, or large frilled collar like those worn by clowns today.

21. Roxane [roks an']

22. Duenna [dwā'nə]: older woman serving as a chaperone and companion to a young woman.

SECOND MARQUIS. And so fresh and cool that anyone coming near her might catch a cold in his heart!

CHRISTIAN. [*Looks up, sees ROXANE, and clutches LIGNIÈRE's arm.*] There she is!

LIGNIÈRE. [*Looking.*] Ah, so she's the one?

CHRISTIAN. Yes. Quickly, tell me who she is! I'm afraid.

LIGNIÈRE. Magdeleine Robin,²³ known as Roxane. Sharp-witted, an intellectual. . .

CHRISTIAN. Alas!

LIGNIÈRE. . . free, an orphan, a cousin of Cyrano, whom we were just discussing. . .

[*At this point a very elegant gentleman, wearing the Cordon Bleu²⁴ around his neck, enters ROXANE'S box and stands talking with her for a few moments.*]

CHRISTIAN. [*Starting.*] Who is that man?

LIGNIÈRE. [*Winking.*] That, my friend, is Count de Guiche.²⁵ He's in love with her, but he's married to Cardinal Richelieu's²⁶ niece. He wants to arrange a marriage between Roxane and Viscount²⁷ de Valvert,²⁸ a sad specimen of a man whom he can count on to be obliging. She's opposed to it, but De Guiche is powerful: he can persecute an untitled girl like her. Incidentally, I've written a song exposing his crafty scheme. He must hate me for it! The ending is positively vicious. Listen, I'll sing it for you. . . . [*He rises to his feet ready to sing.*]

23. Magdeleine Robin [mad'lin rō ban']

24. Cordon Bleu [kōr'don blu']: blue ribbon worn as decoration by members of the order of the Holy Ghost, the highest order of French knighthood at the time.

25. Count de Guiche [də gēsh']

26. Cardinal Richelieu's [rēsh lyuz']: Cardinal Richelieu, born Armand Jean du Plessis (1585-1642), was a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church, chief minister of King Louis XIII, and the most powerful man in France in the mid-1600s.

27. Viscount [vi'kount]: nobleman below the rank of count.

28. de Valvert [də val vār']

CHRISTIAN. No. I'm leaving now.

LIGNIÈRE. Where are you going?

CHRISTIAN. I'm going to pay a visit to Viscount de Valvert!

LIGNIÈRE. Don't do anything rash: there's a good chance he'd kill you. [*Discreetly calls his attention to ROXANE.*] Stay. You're being watched.

CHRISTIAN. It's true! [*He stands staring at her.*]

LIGNIÈRE. I'm the one who's leaving. I'm thirsty and I have an appointment. [*He leaves.*]

LE BRET. [*With relief, coming back to RAGUENEAU after having searched everywhere.*] No sign of Cyrano.

RAGUENEAU. [*Incredulously.*] It doesn't seem possible.

THE CROWD. Begin the play! Begin!

A MARQUIS. [*Watching DE GUICHE come down from ROXANE'S box and walk across the floor, surrounded by obsequious noblemen, one of whom is VISCOUNT DE VALVERT.*] De Guiche has his own little court!

DE GUICHE. I'm going to sit on the stage. Are you coming with me? [*He walks toward the stage, followed by all the MARQUIS and other noblemen, then looks back and calls.*] Come, Valvert!

[*CHRISTIAN has been observing and listening to them. He starts when he hears VALVERT'S name.*]

CHRISTIAN. Valvert! I'll throw my glove in his face this instant! [*Reaches for his gloves and encounters the hand of a thief picking his pocket. Turns around.*] What . . .

THE THIEF. Oh, no!

CHRISTIAN. [*Holding him.*] I was reaching for a glove!

THE THIEF. [*With a pitiful smile.*] You found a

hand instead. [*Lowering his voice and speaking rapidly.*] Let me go and I'll tell you a secret.

CHRISTIAN. [*Still holding him.*] What is it?

THE THIEF. Lignière, who just left you...

CHRISTIAN. [*Without letting go of him.*] Yes? Go on.

THE THIEF. He's about to meet his death. He wrote a song that offended a certain very powerful person, and tonight a hundred men—I know, because I'm to join them soon—have been posted...

CHRISTIAN. A hundred! By whom?

THE THIEF. Sorry, I can't tell you that.

CHRISTIAN. [*Shrugging.*] Oh, come, come!

THE THIEF. [*With great dignity.*] It's a professional secret!

CHRISTIAN. Where are the men posted?

THE THIEF. At the Porte de Nesle,²⁹ on his way. Warn him!

CHRISTIAN. Yes, I'll go! Oh, the vile cowards! A hundred men against one! [*Looks at ROXANE with love.*] How can I bear to leave her? [*At VALVERT with fury.*] And him! But I must save Lignière!

[*He runs out. DE GUICHE, VALVERT, the MARQUIS, and the other noblemen have disappeared behind the curtain to take their places on the benches on the stage. The floor, the gallery, and the boxes are now completely filled.*]

THE CROWD. Begin the play!

A SPECTATOR. Silence!

[*Three more raps from the stage. The curtain opens. Tableau.³⁰ The MARQUIS are seated on either side of the stage in insolent poses. The*

29. *Porte de Nesle* [pôrt' de nes'ə]]

30. *Tableau* [tab lô']; picturesque and motionless scene.

backdrop represents a bluish pastoral³¹ scene. Four small crystal chandeliers light the stage. The violins are playing softly.]

LE BRET. [*To RAGUENEAU, in a low voice.*] Will Montfleury soon be on the stage?

RAGUENEAU. [*Also in a low voice.*] He'll be the first to appear.

LE BRET. Cyrano isn't here.

[*A bagpipe melody is heard, then the enormously fat MONTFLEURY appears on the stage, wearing a shepherd's costume, a hat adorned with roses tilted over one ear, blowing into a beribboned bagpipe.*]

THE CROWD. [*Applauding.*] Montfleury!—Bravo! —Montfleury!

MONTFLEURY. [*After bowing, playing the part of Phaedo.*]

"Happy is he who shuns the pomp of courts
In solitary exile, self-imposed;
And who, when gentle breezes..."

A VOICE. [*From the middle of the floor.*] Haven't I ordered you off the stage for a month, you wretched scoundrel?

[*Astonishment in the audience. Everyone looks around. Murmurs.*]

VARIOUS VOICES. Oh!—What!—Who? [*Those in the boxes stand up to see.*]

CUIGY. He's here!

LE BRET. [*Terrified.*] Cyrano!

THE VOICE. Off the stage this instant, king of buffoons!

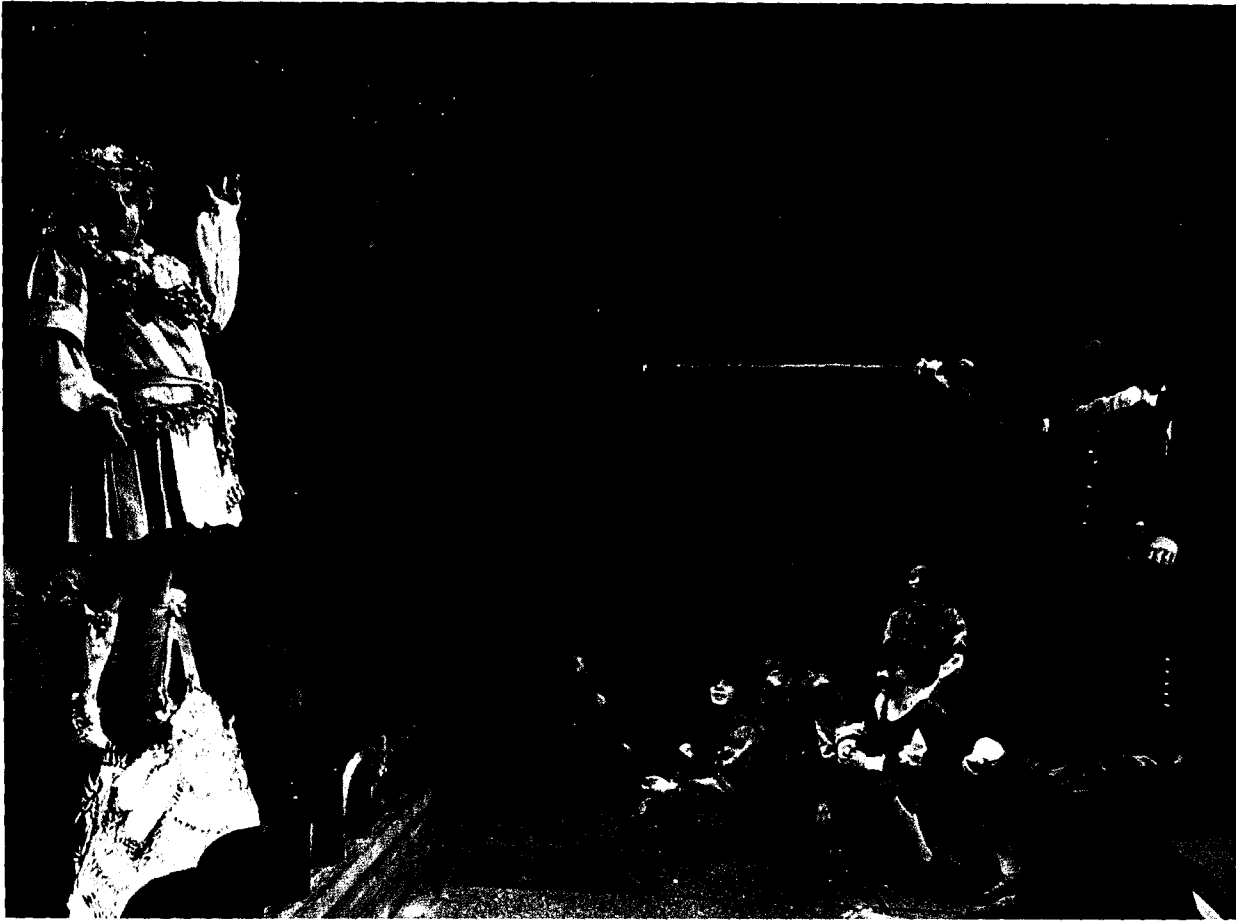
THE WHOLE AUDIENCE. [*Indignantly.*] Oh!

MONTFLEURY. But...

THE VOICE. You refuse?

31. *pastoral*: referring to shepherds and other rural subjects.

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VARIOUS VOICES. [*From the floor and the boxes.*] Sh!—Enough!—Go on, Montfleury!—Don't be afraid!

MONTFLEURY. [*In a faltering voice.*] "Happy is he who shuns the pomp of..."

THE VOICE. [*More threateningly.*] Well, prince of louts, must I give your shoulders a taste of wood?

[*An arm holding a cane rises above the heads of the audience.*]

MONTFLEURY. [*In an increasingly feeble voice.*] "Happy is he who..."

[*The arm waves the cane.*]

THE VOICE. Off the stage!

THE CROWD. Oh!

MONTFLEURY. [*Choking.*] "Happy is he who shuns..."

CYRANO. [*Standing up on a chair with his arms folded, his hat cocked, his mustache bristling, and his nose pointing aggressively.*] I'm about to lose my temper! [*His appearance creates a sensation.*]

MONTFLEURY. [*To the MARQUIS.*] Protect me, gentlemen!

A MARQUIS. [*Nonchalantly.*] Go on with your acting.

CYRANO. If you do, you fat oaf, I'll tan your cheeks!

THE MARQUIS. Enough!

CYRANO. [*To all the MARQUIS.*] I advise you all to sit quietly in your seats. Otherwise my cane will rumple your ribbons!

THE CROWD. [*Retreating.*] Make room!—Step back!

CYRANO. [*To MONTFLEURY.*] Off the stage! [*The crowd closes in with an angry murmur. He quickly turns around.*] Is there something you want to say to me? Speak up!

A LADY. [*In the boxes.*] This is incredible!

A NOBLEMAN. Scandalous!

A BURGHER. Exasperating!

A PAGE. Hilarious!

THE CROWD. Montfleury!—Cyrano!

CYRANO. Silence!

THE CROWD. [*Uproariously.*] Hee-haw!—Baa!—Woof, woof!—Cock-a-doodle-doo!

CYRANO. Quiet, or I'll...

A PAGE. Meow!

CYRANO. I order you to be silent! And I issue a collective challenge! Come, I'll write down your names. Step forward, young heroes! You'll all have a turn, I'll give each of you a number. Now, who wants to be at the top of the list? You, sir? No? You? No? [*Silence.*] No names? No hands?... Then I'll get on with my business. [*He turns back toward the stage, where MONTFLEURY has been waiting in great anxiety.*] I want to see the theater cured of this boil. Otherwise... [*Puts his hand to his sword.*]...I'll lance it!

—MONTFLEURY. I...

CYRANO. [*Descends from his chair, sits down in the middle of the circle that has formed around him, and settles himself as though at home.*] I'm

going to clap my hands three times. By the third clap, you will be gone.

THE CROWD. [*Amused.*] Ah!

CYRANO. [*Clapping his hands.*] One!

—MONTFLEURY. I...

A VOICE. [*From the boxes.*] Stay!

THE CROWD. He'll stay—He'll go!

MONTFLEURY. Gentlemen, I believe...

CYRANO. Two!

—MONTFLEURY. I'm sure it would be better...

CYRANO. Three!

[*MONTFLEURY suddenly disappears. Storm of laughter, hisses, and boos.*]

THE CROWD. Boo!—Boo!—Coward!—Come back!

CYRANO. [*Leans back in his chair, beaming, and crosses his legs.*] Let him come back if he dares!

A YOUNG MAN. [*To CYRANO.*] Tell me, sir, what reason do you have to hate Montfleury?

CYRANO. [*Graciously, still seated.*] I have two reasons, my callow young friend, either of which would be sufficient. The first is that he's a deplorable actor who brays like an ass and wrestles ponderously with lines that ought to soar lightly from his lips. The second—is my secret.

BELLEROSE.³² What about the money that will have to be refunded?

CYRANO. [*Turning his chair toward the stage.*] Now there's the first sensible thing that's yet been said! Far be it from me to impose hardship on practitioners of the Thespian³³ art. [*Stands*

32. Bellerose [bel rōz']: seventeenth-century French actor.

33. Thespian: having to do with drama.

up and throws a bag onto the stage.] Here, take this purse and be quiet.

THE CROWD. [*Astonished.*] Ah!—Oh!

AN ACTOR. [*Quickly picking up the purse and weighing it in his hand.*] At this price, sir, I'll be glad to have you come and stop our performance every day!

THE CROWD. Boo! Boo!

BELLEROSE. Please clear the hall!

[*The spectators begin leaving while CYRANO watches with satisfaction, but they soon stop when they hear the following scene. The ladies in the boxes, who have already stood up and put on their cloaks, stop to listen, and finally sit down again.*]

LE BRET. [*To CYRANO.*] This is madness!

A MEDDLER. [*Who has approached CYRANO.*] What a scandal! Montfleury, the great actor! Don't you know he's protected by the Duke de Candale?³⁴ Do you have a patron?³⁵

CYRANO. No!

THE MEDDLER. What? You have no great lord whose name protects...

CYRANO. I don't rely on some remote patron for protection. [*Puts his hand to his sword.*] My protector is always near at hand.

THE MEDDLER. Are you going to leave the city?

CYRANO. That depends.

THE MEDDLER. But the Duke de Candale has a long arm!

CYRANO. Not as long as mine... [*Pointing to his sword.*] ...when I give it this extension!

THE MEDDLER. But surely you wouldn't dare...

34. Duke of Candale [kan dal']

35. patron: wealthy person who supports an artist.

CYRANO. I would.

THE MEDDLER. But...

CYRANO. Go now.

THE MEDDLER. But...

CYRANO. Go! Or tell me why you're looking at my nose.

THE MEDDLER. [*Petrified.*] I...

CYRANO. [*Moving toward him.*] Do you find it surprising?

THE MEDDLER. [*Stepping back.*] You're mistaken, my lord...

CYRANO. Is it limp and dangling, like an elephant's trunk?

THE MEDDLER. [*Stepping back again.*] I didn't...

CYRANO. Or hooked like an owl's beak?

THE MEDDLER. I...

CYRANO. Do you see a wart at the end of it?

THE MEDDLER. I...

CYRANO. Or a fly walking on it? What's unusual about it?

THE MEDDLER. Nothing, I...

CYRANO. Then why that disdainful expression? Do you find it, perhaps, a little too large?

THE MEDDLER. [*Stammering.*] Oh, no, it's quite small... very small... diminutive....

CYRANO. What! How dare you accuse me of anything so ridiculous? A small nose? *My* nose? You've gone too far!

THE MEDDLER. Please, sir, I...

CYRANO. My nose is *enormous*, you snub-nosed, flat-faced wretch! I carry it with pride, because a big nose is a sign of affability, kindness, courtesy, wit, generosity, and courage. I have all those qualities, but you can never hope to have

any of them, since the ignoble face that my hand is about to meet above your collar has no more glory, nobility, poetry, quaintness, vivacity, or grandeur—no more *nose*, in short— [*Slaps him. The MEDDLER cries out in pain.*]

THE MEDDLER. [*Running away.*] Help! Guards!

DE GUICHE. [*Who has come down from the seats on the stage, with the MARQUIS.*] He's beginning to be annoying!

VALVERT. [*Sbrugging.*] He likes to bluster.

DE GUICHE. Isn't anyone going to silence him?

VALVERT. Yes, *I will!* Just watch his face when he hears what I have to say to him! [*Walks up to CYRANO, who observes him, and stands in front of him with a fatuous expression.*] You have a nose that... Your nose is... um... very big.

CYRANO. [*Gravely.*] Yes, very.

VALVERT. [*Laughing.*] Ha!

CYRANO. [*With perfect calm.*] Is that all?

VALVERT. Well...

CYRANO. I'm afraid your speech was a little short, young man. You could have said... oh, all sorts of things, varying your tone to fit your words. Let me give you a few examples.

In an aggressive tone: "If I had a nose like that, I'd have it amputated!"

Friendly: "The end of it must get wet when you drink from a cup. Why don't you use a tankard?"

Descriptive: "It's a rock, a peak, a cape! No, more than a cape: a peninsula!"

Gracious: "What a kind man you are! You love birds so much that you've given them a perch to roost on."

Solicitous: "Be careful when you walk: with all that weight on your head, you could easily lose your balance and fall."

Thoughtful: "You ought to put an awning over it, to keep its color from fading in the sun."

Flippant: "That tusk must be convenient to hang your hat on."

Grandiloquent: "No wind but the mighty Arctic blast, majestic nose, could ever give you a cold from one end to the other!"

Dramatic: "When it bleeds, it must be like the Red Sea!"³⁶

Admiring: "What a sign for a perfume shop!"

Rustic: "That don't look like no nose to me. It's either a big cucumber or a little watermelon."

Military: "The enemy is charging! Aim your cannon!"

There, now you have an inkling of what you might have said to me if you were witty and a man of letters. Unfortunately you're totally witless and a man of very few letters: only the four that spell the word "fool."

DE GUICHE. [*Trying to lead away the outraged VALVERT.*] Come, never mind.

VALVERT. [*Choking with anger.*] Such arrogance from an uncouth barbarian who... who... isn't even wearing gloves! Who appears in public without ribbons, or tassels, or braid!

CYRANO. I have a different idea of elegance. I don't dress like a fop,³⁷ it's true, but my moral grooming is impeccable. I never appear in public with a soiled conscience, a tarnished honor, threadbare scruples, or an insult that I haven't washed away. I'm always immaculately clean, adorned with independence and frankness. I may not cut a stylish figure, but I hold my soul erect. I wear my deeds as ribbons, my wit is sharper than the finest mustache, and when I walk among men I make truths ring like spurs.

VALVERT. [*Exasperated.*] Buffoon!

CYRANO. [*Crying out as if in pain.*] Oh! I have a cramp in my sword.

VALVERT. [*Drawing his own.*] So be it!

36. Red Sea: sea in the Near East that is colored by a reddish algae at certain periods of the year.

37. fop: man who is overly concerned with his appearance; a dandy.

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CYRANO. I'll give you a charming little thrust.

VALVERT. [*Contemptuously.*] Poet!

CYRANO. Yes, sir, I *am* a poet, as I'll demonstrate by composing an impromptu³⁸ ballade while I fence with you.

VALVERT. A ballade?

CYRANO. You don't know what that is? Allow me to explain.

VALVERT. But...

CYRANO. [*As though reciting a lesson.*] The ballade consists of three eight-line stanzas...

VALVERT. [*Stamping his foot.*] Oh!

CYRANO. [*Continuing.*] ...with a four-line refrain at the end.

VALVERT. You...

CYRANO. I'm going to compose one as I fight with you, and when I come to the last line, I'll draw blood.

VALVERT. No!

CYRANO. No? Wait and see.

THE CROWD. [*Greatly excited.*] Make room!—This will be worth seeing!—Step back!—Quiet!

CYRANO. [*Closing his eyes for a moment.*] Wait, I'm thinking of how to begin. ... There, I have it. [*His actions match his words throughout the ballade.*]

I take off my hat and discard it,
I slowly abandon my cloak,
I draw my sword out of its scabbard,
Preparing to put it to use.
For the moment, I stand here before you,
Elegant, calm, and serene,
But I warn you, my impudent scoundrel,
When I end the refrain, I draw blood.

[*They begin fencing.*]

38. *impromptu*: spontaneous, without preparation.

You should have avoided this battle.
Now, where shall I skewer you, goose?
In the side, 'neath the sleeve of your doublet?
In the heart, 'neath the ribbon you wear?
No, I've carefully thought and reflected,
And finally made up my mind;
The paunch: that's where I've decided,
When I end the refrain, to draw blood.

I see you give ground when I press you;
Your face is as white as a sheet;
Is "coward" a name that would suit you?
I dexterously parry the point³⁹
That you hoped to thrust into my entrails;
Your efforts are doomed to be vain.
Prepare yourself now to be punctured:
When I end the refrain, I draw blood.

[*Announces solemnly.*]

Refrain:

Pray God to forgive your transgressions!
The close of our combat draws near;
A coupé,⁴⁰ then a feint,⁴¹ then the finish!
[*He lunges. VALVERT staggers. CYRANO bows.*]
When I end the refrain, I draw blood.

[*Cheers. Applause from the boxes. Flowers and handkerchiefs are thrown down. Officers surround and congratulate CYRANO. RAGUENEAU dances with delight. LE BRET is both happy and appalled. VALVERT's friends lead him away, holding him up.*]

THE CROWD. [*In a long cry.*] Ah!...

A LIGHT-HORSEMAN. Magnificent!

A WOMAN. Charming!

RAGUENEAU. Phenomenal!

A MARQUIS. Unheard of!

LE BRET. Foolhardy!

39. *parry the point*: prevent an opponent from striking with his sword.

40. *coupé* [kōō pā']: forceful stroke.

41. *feint* [fānt]: movement meant to deceive.

THE CROWD. [*Swarming around* CYRANO.] Congratulations!—My compliments!—Bravo!

A WOMAN'S VOICE. He's a hero!

LE BRET. [*To* CYRANO, *taking his arm.*] I'd like to have a talk with you.

CYRANO. Wait till this crowd thins out a little. [*To* BELLEROSE.] May I stay?

BELLEROSE. [*Respectfully.*] Of course, sir! [*Changing his tone, to the DOORKEEPER and the man who is preparing to put out the candles.*] Sweep out the theater and lock the door, but leave the candles burning. We'll come back after dinner to rehearse the new farce we're going to present tomorrow. [*Goes out.*]

THE DOORKEEPER. [*To* CYRANO.] Aren't you going to dine, sir?

CYRANO. No. [*The DOORKEEPER withdraws.*]

LE BRET. [*To* CYRANO.] Why not?

CYRANO. [*Proudly.*] Because... [*Changing his tone, seeing that the DOORKEEPER is out of ear-shot.*] Because I have no money.

LE BRET. [*Making the gesture of throwing a bag.*] What! That bag of money...

CYRANO. Alas, my month's allotment lived only for a day!

LE BRET. And for the rest of the month...

CYRANO. I have nothing left.

LE BRET. What foolishness to throw it all away!

CYRANO. Yes, but what a gesture!

THE REFRESHMENT GIRL. [*Coughing from behind her little counter.*] Ahem!... [*CYRANO and LE BRET turn around. She comes forward timidly.*] Sir, I... I can't bear to think of you going hungry. [*Points to the refreshment table.*] I have plenty of food here... Take whatever you like!

CYRANO. [*Gallantly taking off his hat.*] My dear child, my Gascon pride forbids me to accept the slightest morsel from your fingers, but since I fear a refusal would offend you, I will accept... [*Goes to the refreshment table and chooses.*] Oh, very little! One of these grapes... [*She tries to give him the whole cluster; he picks off a single grape.*] Only one!... This glass of water... [*She tries to pour him a glass of wine; he stops her.*] And half a macaroon. [*Breaks one and gives her back the other half.*]

LE BRET. But that's ridiculous!

THE REFRESHMENT GIRL. Oh, please take something else!

CYRANO. I will. Your lovely hand. [*She holds out her hand to him and he kisses it as if she were a princess.*]

THE REFRESHMENT GIRL. Thank you, sir. [*Bows.*] Good-by. [*Leaves.*]

CYRANO. [*To* LE BRET.] You wanted to have a talk with me? I'm ready to listen. [*Sets the macaroon down on the refreshment table in front of him.*] My dinner!... [*Sets down the glass of water.*] My drink!... [*And finally the grape.*] My dessert! [*Sits down.*] There, I'm ready to begin. I have an excellent appetite this evening. [*Eating.*] What was it you wanted to tell me?

LE BRET. That you're going to have some badly distorted ideas if you listen only to those fools who like to give themselves such warlike airs. Talk with a few sensible people and you'll be better informed of the effect produced by your act of bravado.

CYRANO. [*Finishing his macaroon.*] It was enormous.

LE BRET. You've made too many enemies!

CYRANO. About how many would you say I made today?

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LE BRET. There's Montfleury, then the burgher⁴² you kicked, De Guiche, Valvert, of course, Baro,⁴³ the Academy⁴⁴...

CYRANO. Stop! That's already enough to delight me!

LE BRET. I don't understand the way you live. Where will it lead you? What are you trying to accomplish?

CYRANO. I was once confused and bewildered by all the complicated courses of action that were open to me. Finally I chose...

LE BRET. What did you choose?

CYRANO. The simplest course of all. I decided to be admirable in everything!

LE BRET. If you say so... But let me ask you something else. What's the real reason for your hatred of Montfleury? You can tell *me* the truth.

CYRANO. [*Standing up.*] That bloated old sot, I've hated him since the day when I saw him look at... It was like watching a slimy slug crawling on a flower!

LE BRET. [*Astonished.*] What's this? Do I understand you rightly? Is it possible that...

CYRANO. [*With a bitter laugh.*] That I'm in love? [*Changing to a grave tone.*] Yes, it's true.

LE BRET. May I ask with whom? You've never told me...

CYRANO. With whom I'm in love? Come now, think a moment: this nose of mine, which precedes me by a quarter of an hour wherever I go, forbids me ever to dream of being loved by even an ugly woman. Whom else would I love but the

most beautiful woman in the world?

LE BRET. The most beautiful...

CYRANO. Of course! The most beautiful of all women! The most captivating, the most intelligent... [*Dejectedly.*]... the blondest....

LE BRET. Tell me: who is she?

CYRANO. Anyone who has seen her smile has known perfection. She creates grace without movement, and makes all divinity fit into her slightest gesture. And neither Venus⁴⁵ in her shell, nor Diana⁴⁶ striding in the great, blossoming forest, can compare to her when she goes through the streets of Paris in her sedan chair!⁴⁷

LE BRET. Now I believe I know! It *is* becoming clear!

CYRANO. It's perfectly transparent.

LE BRET. Your cousin, Magdeleine Robin?

CYRANO. Yes—Roxane.

LE BRET. Then you ought to be overjoyed! You love her? Tell her so! You've covered yourself with glory in her eyes today!

CYRANO. Look at me and tell me what hope this protuberance might leave me! I have no illusions. Sometimes, in the blue shadows of evening, I give way to tender feelings. I go into a garden, smelling the fragrance of spring with my poor monstrous nose, and watch a man and a woman strolling together in the moonlight. I think how much I, too, would like to be walking arm in arm with a woman, under the moon. I let myself be carried away, I forget myself—and then I suddenly see the shadow of my profile on the garden wall.

LE BRET. [*Deeply moved.*] My friend...

42. burgher: person who lives in a town.

43. Baro [ba rô']: Balthazar Baro (1600-1650), author of *La Clorise*, the play that Cyrano interrupted.

44. Academy: The French Academy, founded in 1635, is made up of France's forty most distinguished writers.

45. Venus: Roman goddess of love and beauty.

46. Diana: Roman goddess of the moon and hunting.

47. sedan chair: enclosed chair carried on poles.

CYRANO. My friend, I have bad moments now and then, feeling myself so ugly, all alone....

LE BRET. [*With concern, taking his hand.*] Do you weep?

CYRANO. Oh, no, never! No, it would be grotesque if a tear ran down this nose! As long as it's in my power to prevent it, I'll never let the divine beauty of tears be sullied by such gross ugliness.

LE BRET. But you're overlooking your courage, your wit!... Take that girl who offered to give you dinner just now, for example: you could see for yourself that she was far from detesting you!

CYRANO. [*Struck by this realization.*] Yes, it's true!

LE BRET. Well, then? You see? And Roxane herself was pale as she watched your duel....

CYRANO. Pale?

LE BRET. You've already made a deep impression on her heart and her mind. Don't be timid: speak to her, tell her, so that...

CYRANO. So that she'll laugh in my face? No! That's the one thing in the world that I fear!

THE DOORKEEPER. [*Bringing in ROXANE'S DUENNA.*] Sir, this lady would like to speak to you.

CYRANO. [*Seeing the DUENNA.*] Her duenna!

THE DUENNA. [*With a deep bow.*] My lady wishes me to ask her valiant cousin where she can see him in private.

CYRANO. [*Thunderstruck.*] See me?

THE DUENNA. [*With another bow.*] Yes. She has things to tell you.

CYRANO. Things to...

THE DUENNA. [*Bowing again.*] To tell you.

CYRANO. [*Unsteady on his feet.*] My—

THE DUENNA. She will go to early Mass at the Saint-Roch⁴⁸ church tomorrow morning.

CYRANO. [*Clutching LE BRET to steady himself.*] Ah—

THE DUENNA. When she leaves the church, where can she go to talk with you?

CYRANO. [*Agitated.*] Where?... I... Where...

THE DUENNA. Well?

CYRANO. I'm trying to think!

THE DUENNA. Tell me.

CYRANO. At... at Ragueneau's shop... Ragueneau, the pastry cook....

THE DUENNA. [*Withdrawing.*] Very well. At seven o'clock.

CYRANO. I'll be there.

[*The DUENNA leaves.*]

CYRANO. [*Falling into LE BRET'S arms.*] Me! She wants to see me!

LE BRET. I see your sadness has vanished!

CYRANO. Ah, for whatever reason, she knows I exist!

LE BRET. Please be calm.

CYRANO. No! I'm going to be frenzied and turbulent! I need a whole army to vanquish! I have ten hearts, twenty arms! It's no longer enough for me to cut down dwarfs... [*Shouts at the top of his lungs.*]... I need giants!

[*For some time now, the ACTORS and ACTRESSES have been moving on the stage: the rehearsal is beginning.*]

A VOICE. [*From the stage.*] Quiet! We're rehearsing!

48. Saint-Roch [san rōsh']



CYRANO. [*Laughing.*] And we're leaving!

[*He goes upstage. Through the entrance of the theater come CUIGY, BRISSAILLE, and several OFFICERS holding up LIGNIÈRE.*]

CUIGY. Cyrano!

CYRANO. What is it?

CUIGY. We've brought a friend—

CYRANO. [*Recognizing him.*] LigniÈre!... What's happened to you?

CUIGY. He wants to see you.

BRISSAILLE. He can't go home.

CYRANO. Why not?

LIGNIÈRE. [*Holding up a crumpled piece of paper.*] This note warns me...hundred men against me...because of...of a song...great danger... Porte de Nesle...on my way home.... Will you let me...let me sleep under your roof tonight?

CYRANO. A hundred men, you say? You'll sleep at home tonight!

LIGNIÈRE. [*Alarmed.*] But...

CYRANO. [*In a thunderous voice.*] Take that lantern...[LIGNIÈRE *quickly obeys.*]...and walk! I'll cover you! [*To the OFFICERS.*] And you, follow at a distance: you'll be witnesses!

Cyrano de Bergerac, Act I 401

CUIGY. But a hundred men! . . .

CYRANO. I need at least that many this evening!

[*The ACTORS and ACTRESSES, in their various costumes, have come down from the stage and approached the group.*]

AN ACTRESS. [*To the others.*] But why should there be a hundred men against one poor poet?

CYRANO. Let's go! [*To the OFFICERS.*] Gentlemen, when you see me charge, don't come to my assistance, no matter how great the danger!

ANOTHER ACTRESS. [*Leaping down from the stage.*] I want to go and watch!

CYRANO. Bravo! Officers, ladies in costume, and twenty paces in front . . . [*He takes up the station he has described.*] . . . I will walk alone, under the plume that glory herself has placed on my hat, with twice the pride of Scipio,⁴⁹ and a nose three times as long! . . . Remember, now: no one is

49. Scipio [sip'ē ō] (234–183 B.C.): Roman general.

allowed to lift a finger to help me! . . . All ready? One, two, three! Doorkeeper, open the door! [*The DOORKEEPER opens both halves of the door, giving a glimpse of picturesque old Paris in the moonlight.*] Ah, Paris lies before us, dim and nebulous in the shadows, with moonlight flowing down the slopes of her roofs! An exquisite setting for the scene about to be performed! There, beneath the mist, the Seine⁵⁰ quivers like a mysterious magic mirror. . . . And you will see what you will see!

ALL. To the Porte de Nesle!

CYRANO. [*Standing on the threshold.*] To the Porte de Nesle! [*Turns to the ACTRESS.*] You asked, mademoiselle, why a hundred men had been sent to attack one poet. [*Calmly, drawing his sword.*] I'll tell you: it's because that poet is known to be a friend of mine. [*He goes out. The procession moves forward into the night, to the sound of the violins, and in the dim glow of the candles.*]

50. Seine [sen]: river that flows through Paris.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. Why has Christian come to the play? What concern does he express to Lignière?
2. Prior to his entry on stage, what do we learn of Cyrano's appearance and personality from the descriptions of his friends?
3. Briefly retell what happens when Montfleury tries to begin the play. How does Cyrano appease the audience?
4. List three of the comments Cyrano makes up about his nose. Describe his duel with Valvert.
5. What does Cyrano confide to Le Bret after the crowd leaves? How does the duenna's visit change his mood?

6. What favor does Lignière ask of Cyrano, and how does Cyrano respond?

Interpreting

7. What does the fact that Cyrano gives away his money to refund the tickets show about him?
8. In his verbal battles in Act I, what skills and qualities does Cyrano display?
9. What does Cyrano's eagerness to take on the enemies of Lignière reveal about him?
10. What does Cyrano mean when he says, "I may not cut a stylish figure, but I hold my soul erect"? List two actions that illustrate this statement.

Extending

11. Do you think pride like Cyrano's is foolish, or do you find it admirable? Why?