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Cyrano de Bergerac

Edmond Rostand · *1897 · Gladys Thomas and Mary F. Guillemard (1898)*

A Gascon poet-swordsman with a famously large nose writes another man's love and keeps his own secret under Roxane's balcony. Edmond Rostand's verse play is panache—courage with style—to the last word. This site hosts the 1898 English of Gladys Thomas and Mary F. Guillemard, which ends not on a 'white plume' but on 'My panache.'

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is panache worth if it will not speak its own love until too late, and can a borrowed voice still be a loyal one?

"My panache."

Cyrano · Act V, his last word, after naming what he will carry into 'Christ's fair courts'

Cyrano will fight a hundred men, mock his own nose, and feed his friend poetry, but he will not, until he is dying, claim Roxane's love in his own name. Christian has the face; Cyrano has the soul of the letters; Roxane loves, first, the words. The generosity is real, and so is the pride that hides. At the convent, years later, the truth comes as he is struck down by a hidden blow. He falls fighting still, and what he will not let them take is his panache. Quote this translation, not a later English 'white plume.'

KEY CHARACTERS

Cyrano de Bergerac
Poet, swordsman, and hidden lover, whose pride and generosity share one face.

Roxane
His cousin, who loves wit and, late, recognizes the voice she has always heard.

Christian de Neuvillette
The handsome cadet who borrows Cyrano's words and dies before the debt can be honestly paid.

Le Bret and Ragueneau
The loyal friend and the pastry-cook poet, who attend the long ending.

Comte de Guiche
The powerful rival, sometimes generous, who is also the play's world of preferment and war.

ONE THING LEFT

> *"'Tis a rock!. . .a peak!. . .a cape!"*
> **Cyrano** · Act I

> *"My panache."*
> **Cyrano** · Act V, last word

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
The Hotel de Bourgogne
ACT I

A theatre, a crowded pit, and Cyrano stopping the play to fight a duel in verse. Roxane is in her box; Christian, new to the Guards, sees her. The nose is already a legend and a wound.

- The duel-ballade is panache as public craft.
- The descriptive catalogue of the nose—"'Tis a rock!. . .a peak!. . .a cape!'—is this translation's wording.
- Le Bret already knows the hidden love.

02
The Bakery of the Poets
ACT II

Roxane, in Ragueneau's shop, asks Cyrano to befriend the handsome Christian. Cyrano, who had hoped for himself, promises—and then offers Christian his wit.

- The sacrifice is immediate and almost unspoken.
- The compact of face and soul is the plot's engine and its cost.
- The cadets and de Guiche set the war and the danger coming.

03
Under a Balcony
ACT III

Christian cannot speak well enough. Cyrano, in the dark, becomes the voice. The kiss is Christian's; the words are not. De Guiche is delayed by a pretended fall from the moon, and a sudden marriage is snatched before the regiment leaves for Arras.

- The balcony is the play's most famous kindness and its most famous deceit.
- Roxane weds the man she thinks has both gifts.
- Cyrano's self-erasure is complete for the moment.

04
The Cadets at Arras
ACT IV

Besieged, the Gascons starve. Cyrano crosses the lines daily to send a letter. Roxane comes to the camp. Christian, learning the truth of the letters, would have it told—and is shot before it can be.

- The daily letters are love as duty under fire.
- Christian's last impulse is more honest than the pact.
- Cyrano, at Roxane's request, keeps the secret over a dead friend.

05
A Convent Garden
ACT V

Fourteen years later, Cyrano visits Roxane as he is dying of a hidden blow. He asks to read Christian's last letter, which he knows by heart. The voice is recognized. He rises to fight shadow-enemies, and his last word is his panache.

- 'You strip from me the laurel and the rose!'—but one thing is left unstained.
- He would enter 'Christ's fair courts' with that one thing still his.
- The translation's last word is "My panache." Do not replace it with a later English line.

> *"'Tis a rock!. . .a peak!. . .a cape!"*
> **Cyrano** · Act I, the 'descriptive' variation in the nose speech

Panache · A Hidden Love · Pride · Loyalty · Words and Faces

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is the 1898 English verse translation by Gladys Thomas and Mary F. Guillemard (Project Gutenberg #1254), not a later stage version. The last word in this text is "My panache."—not the later popular English "my white plume." Quote this translation only.
2. The nose speech's 'descriptive' line is "'Tis a rock!. . .a peak!. . .a cape!" (spaced ellipses in this text).
3. Near the close Cyrano says he will enter "Christ's fair courts," and that, void of stain, he bears one thing away. Then, to Roxane: "My panache."
4. The play is five acts, in verse in this English. It includes duels, a siege, and a hidden, fatal blow. It is a romance of honor, and also a story of a long unspoken love.
5. Do not lean on another edition's wording when a classroom quotation is needed; this map's lines are from Thomas and Guillemard only.

Quotations are verbatim from the Gladys Thomas and Mary F. Guillemard (1898), Project Gutenberg #1254, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/cyrano-de-bergerac/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.