

## ABSTRACT

The Ideal World of Edmond Rostand's  
*Cyrano de Bergerac*: A Director's Approach

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Edmond Rostand wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac* during a time when realism was beginning to assert its dominance over French theatre. Rostand's masterpiece, with its neo-Romantic attributes, is often perceived as a reaction against the new theatrical movement as well as a celebration of France's history. The play's enduring popularity can be attributed to its emphasis on the ideal exemplified in the dynamic and heroic title character.

This director's approach to *Cyrano de Bergerac* examines the history behind the play including the playwright's life, work, sources for the play, and its importance in *fin-de-siècle* France. A thorough analysis of the script and genre helps to initiate dialogues with designers about directorial concepts and helps to guide actors through a production style that supports the text. This study also includes the artistic challenges, concepts, and decisions that shaped choices for the play before concluding with a critical examination of the final product.

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*Cyrano de Bergerac*: A Director's Approach

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Theater Arts

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Fine Arts

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest appreciation goes out to Dr. Marion Castleberry who has served as my thesis chairperson. His constant encouragement and steadfast guidance have motivated me to do the best work possible; it has been an honor to work with him throughout my graduate career. I would also like to thank Dr. DeAnna Toten Beard who continues to teach me what it means to be a respected scholar. I desire to follow her example. Dr. Cristian Bratuø expertise in French literature and the language has been an invaluable resource throughout the year; I am glad he was on my team. My thanks also goes to Dr. Paul Larson for joining my committee at the end of the process.

Thomas Ward was instrumental during the rehearsal process as my directing advisor and fight choreographer. His patience and professionalism with multiple concerns helped me understand the collaborative process better. I am grateful for the designers who lent their talents to the production, most of whom worked overtime to see it to completion. I am also grateful to the faculty at large, especially Dr. Stan Denman and Dr. David Jortner, for allowing me the opportunity to direct *Cyrano de Bergerac* and assisting me along the way. Thank you for trusting me with such an epic production.

The tremendous talent in the cast challenged me to be at the top of my game. I am proud of their hard work and humbled by the experience. The production staff and crews worked tirelessly to make sure the show was ready for performance, sacrificing countless hours of their time. Their work did not go unnoticed.

Personally, I am indebted to my colleague and friend, Amber Jackson, who has walked beside me through every step in this process, spurring me on to the finish.

To my family back home:  
my mother, my father, my sister, and her family

You have all been instrumental in keeping me  
positive and focused over the past three years

My work is for you and to the glory of God



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Playwright and the History behind *Cyrano de Bergerac*

#### *Introduction*

*Cyrano de Bergerac* is perhaps one of the most beloved plays in all of theatrical history. The story, loosely based upon a seventeenth-century swordsman and poet, is the work of the talented idealist, Edmond Rostand. Rostand's work in *fin-de-siècle* Paris was instrumental in helping to revive French nationalism which had been in decay since the crushing defeats of the Franco-Prussian War nearly thirty years earlier. The play's debut in December of 1897 was an unprecedented theatrical triumph, and the story has gone on to find lasting popularity with audiences around the world. By examining the playwright's personal history, the thematic content of his work, sources for the story, and the play's critical reception and subsequent popularity, I will argue that Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* is an illustration of ideal love and heroic principles that continues to capture, captivate, and inspire generations of spectators and scholars. In a time when theatre was being overtaken by dry realism and extreme naturalism, Rostand's play stands apart as a work that captures the longing in the soul for high ideas, great sacrifice, and pure love.

#### *The Life and Works of Edmond Rostand*

Edmond Rostand was born in Marseilles, France on April 1, 1868, the firstborn child of Eugène and Angèle Rostand. Eugène Rostand was a well-respected lawyer for a time before turning to banking, a successful family business. Both Rostand's father

Eugène and his uncle Alexis were artistically inclined. Eugène dabbled in poetry while Alexis was an accomplished musician and composer (Amoia 16). Their interest in the fine arts insured that Rostand would be exposed to various forms of literature, theatre, and music during his formative years. Rostand, along with his two younger sisters, was also encouraged to practice various artistic endeavors. As a result of his exposure and experimentation, the future playwright showed an aptitude for prose writing as well as a marked interest in the theatre at an early age.

In addition to his artistic explorations, Rostand also displayed another trait which would mark his work and his obsession with the ideal. Rostand's mother remarked that as a boy, Rostand was extremely particular in what he wore. He exhibited a sort of fastidiousness that prevented him from wearing anything that had a mark on it (Lloyd 6). Rostand's work as an adult would likewise be marked by a consuming desire for perfection. But why would Rostand relentlessly strive for something so unattainable? The answer may lie in his childhood.

Rostand's upbringing and schooling would primarily take place in Marseilles. He flourished under the instruction of his teachers and quickly illustrated a predisposition for creative writing. However, while Rostand was at the Lycée de Marseille, he was either told or discovered that his father and uncle were born illegitimately (7). Rostand biographer Sue Lloyd speculates that Rostand's discovery of the circumstances surrounding their birth contributed to the desire to make something of himself by sheer determination and talent. She argues that "the illegitimate births of Eugène and Alexis had a traumatic effect on both them and their descendants, giving them inferiority complexes from which they could only escape by making enormous efforts to succeed,

all the while fearful that they would not (8). Rostand's discovery that his father's name and legacy were tainted seemed to have affected the young writer deeply. He began to dream of and fixate on the ideal after learning the difficult truth about his blemished reality.

In school, his teachers often labeled Rostand a daydreamer. Instead of completing his assignments, the young playwright would prefer to look out the window and create stories in his imagination. When he did apply himself, Rostand excelled in French composition and history, revealing a deep sensitivity for literary studies (Amoia 17). He would always struggle in math as he was not an abstract thinker and chose to focus his time and talent on literary endeavors. At this young age, Rostand preferred writing in prose to poetry a predilection which would reverse itself in his adult career. When required to present oral recitations, Rostand exhibited a natural ability to capture and hold his audience's attention. One classmate, Jean Payoud, would remember Rostand as an actor born (qtd. in Lloyd 10). Rostand's natural ability with words and his love for literature and composition made him an ideal candidate for professional life in the theatre.

Rostand's teachers were responsible for encouraging the boy's burgeoning talents. They were also responsible for exposing the young student to eighteenth-century novelist Théophile Gautier. Gautier is probably best known for his novel *Le Capitaine Fracasse* as well as a series of collected essays entitled *Les Grottesques*. Rostand admired the works of Gautier almost immediately, as they were filled with swashbuckling adventures and exaggerated characters. Elements of both *Le Capitaine Fracasse* and *Les Grottesques* would reappear in the creation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* many years later.

Recreationally, Rostand loved to spend his time at the puppet theatre, which was a short way from his home in Marseilles. Here he was exposed to stock characters such as Polichinelle, Guignol, and other popular personalities derived from Italian *commedia dell'arte*. These characters would later influence his own, whether they were merely suggested in the physical aspects of *Cyrano* or individually represented in *La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan*. His interest in the puppet theatre was so keen that the young Rostand was eventually given his own miniature version with which to play. Rostand's initial foray into playwriting began with little original verse dramas for his puppets to perform. Additionally, Rostand would devote as much time to designing sets and costumes for his puppet shows as he would actually performing them (Lloyd 7). His eye for detail and devotion to every aspect of production would manifest itself in his adult professional life as well.

Rostand's education eventually led him to Paris, to complete his basic instruction in rhetoric and philosophy. Here, he was enrolled in the Collège Stanislas, a fundamental Catholic institution, where a particular teacher, René Doumic would further encourage Rostand's literary endeavors. Doumic would also be responsible for reintroducing Rostand to the historical *Cyrano de Bergerac*, by having his class read selected works by the seventeenth-century poet (Lloyd 23). Doumic would also encourage Rostand to enter an essay competition held by the Académie de Marseilles on the subject "Deux romanciers de Provence: Honoré d'Urfé et Émile Zola" (Freeman 10). The essay compared the works of D'Urfé and Zola who, although from the same region of France, wrote almost three centuries apart. D'Urfé was a seventeenth-century novelist, while Zola was a novelist and dramatist contemporary with Rostand. According to N. Scarlyn

Wilson, the extreme contrast between the pastoral artificiality of the early seventeenth-century writer and the brutal realism of his own contemporary appealed greatly to Rostand. In his essay, Rostand held D'Urfé in higher regard, an early sign that the nostalgia of the past appealed to Rostand's sensibilities rather than naturalism's brutal examination of reality in the late nineteenth century. Rostand won the contest. Rostand's teacher Doumic eventually became a lifelong advocate for Rostand, critically praising him in French journals after Rostand had launched his professional career. Another instructor, Boris de Tannenberg, introduced Rostand to the writings of William Shakespeare and Lope de Vega (Lloyd 24). These popular foreign writers held no strict adherence to the classical unities which had been the foundation of French writing for two centuries.

After successfully completing his studies at the Collège Stanislas, Rostand enrolled in law school. Though he had made it known to his family that he wished to pursue a writing career, they had all agreed that he should study law as a secondary means of earning a living should he fail to find success in the literary world. During his time in law school, however, Rostand seemed to spend every available moment attending the theatre. Parisian theatre was, during this period, a widely varied institution. Classical works were to be found at the state-run theatres such as the Comédie Française and the Odéon, melodramas and other well-made plays flourished at boulevard playhouses, while other variety acts, vaudevilles, and cabarets were performed at various cafés, clubs, and bars. Rostand dutifully spent his days studying law, but his nights were dedicated to either writing poetry or watching another theatrical performance in an attempt to expand his artistic horizons.

Traditionally, the entire Rostand family traveled to the village of Luchon for their summer vacations. Luchon was, at the time, a quaint village situated between Spain and Gascony where Eugène Rostand had a summer home built. Luchon's location, at the foot of the majestic Pyrenees, inspired Edmond Rostand's love of nature which would figure prominently in his poetry and select plays such as *Chantecler*. Luchon's proximity to Gascony exposed the young playwright to the regional dialects, habits, and folklore which would influence the characters, relationships, and language in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Luchon would also be the place where Rostand would meet his future wife.

During the summer of 1887, on holiday from his law studies, Rostand traveled to Luchon, as expected, to spend time with his family. His father, Eugène had invited a young woman he had met on the train to Luchon to call upon the family; her name was Rosemonde Gérard. Two years older than Rostand, Rosemonde was already a respected poet in her own right, having made a name for herself within the literary circles of Paris by means of talent and connection. The two had much in common in addition to their mutual love for poetry and drama: both also suffered the stigma of illegitimacy. Rosemonde had been born the result of an adulterous affair between her mother and a French count, although her mother was married to an Englishman named Lee at the time (Lloyd 40). The resulting connection between Rostand and Rosemonde continued to grow upon their return to Paris in the fall. They would be engaged the following summer.

Rostand's budding romance with Rosemonde would also result in the first public performance of his work. Rostand became friends with Rosemonde's half-brother, Henry Lee. Together, the two of them would write, in prose, a vaudevillian comedy called *Le*

*Gant rouge* which, to their surprise, was selected by the Théâtre de Cluny for performance (Woollen vii). The plot of *Le Gant rouge* centered on some love letters concealed in a shop sign (the red glove of the title), and the efforts of the various characters to obtain, conceal or destroy them (Lloyd 44). The play opened in August of 1888, but only ran for fifteen performances before being pulled from the theatre's summer repertoire. After this initial failure, Rostand seems to have turned his energies to writing in verse, which would prove to be his dramatic and literary legacy.

His first book of poems, *Les Musardises*, was published at his own expense in 1890, just prior to his marriage to Rosemonde. It was common practice in those days to publish your own work. Rostand had five hundred copies printed, but because he had few connections and no publicity, the initial printing only sold about thirty copies (50). The few critics who reviewed the book found it reflected a promising new talent. A revised copy, prepared in 1911 by Rostand, would fare much better in part because of his post-Cyrano fame.

Rostand and Rosemonde were married in April of 1890. She would immediately set aside her own poetic ambitions to support Rostand's rising career. Rosemonde's tireless efforts at promoting her husband's talents as well as her continued personal encouragement when inspiration flagged helped to insure Rostand's success. Their two sons, Maurice and Jean, would be born early in the marriage. Rosemonde focused her energies on running the home and raising the children while at the same time continually entertaining Rostand's growing theatrical and literary associates to help promote Rostand's work as the turn of the century approached.

*Fin-de-siècle* Paris was alive with the energy of modern times. Here, as well as in other major European cities, theatre had begun its shift to realism, naturalism, and other evolutionary forms in various independent theatres. Rostand took immediate notice of the cynicism and disillusionment that pervaded the new plays at the end of the century. While appreciating the theatrical innovations brought about by the likes of André Antoine, Émile Zola, and Alfred Jarry, Rostand resisted the modern movement with zealous dedication. He made a decision to become himself a fighter against defeatism, not only the defeatism due to the defeat of France by Prussia in 1871, but the disillusion and apathy infecting his whole generation (18). To do so, he would focus his creative energies on stories that would resurrect the beautiful, the sacrificial, the patriotic, and the ideal.

Additionally, Rostand found elitist groups, such as the Symbolists, too decadent and superior for his tastes. He firmly believed that poetry and theatre were for the masses. In one poem, from *Les Musardises*, Rostand writes:

Our first duty is to sing for everyone  
Fie on difficult art just for literary cliques! (qtd. in Lloyd 51-52)

According to American critic Clayton Hamilton in his book *Conversations on Contemporary Drama*, Rostand cared nothing for the fashionable drama of the day (24). The subject matter and inspiration for his early poetry reflects, conversely, a concern for the unpopular failures in life, *les ratés*. Rostand's reputation as a writer would eventually rest on his ability to write poetry and verse drama that, while looking to the past, featured individuals who failed to achieve their dreams. Audiences and readers alike could relate; there was a heartfelt connection to the dream and to the unfulfilled longings of the soul.



While Rostand was engaged to Rosemonde, they had collaborated on a one-act play entitled *Pierrot qui pleure et Pierrot qui rit*. The little play used stock characters from *commedia dell'arte* to tell the story of two Pierrots—one who weeps and one who laughs. The action of the play centers on the two Pierrots and their efforts to win the hand of Columbine (Lloyd 49). Friends responded so well to the play, which they felt was in the style of popular playwright Théodore de Banville, that Rostand decided to submit it to the Comédie-Française (Wilson xi). The revised version was renamed *Les Deux Pierrots*. Through an acquaintance, the play was delivered to the director of the state theatre. The review process for new works at the Comédie-Française was slow and based solely on a reading committee comprised of *Sociétaires*, lifelong members of the troupe. Ultimately, they rejected the play, but not based upon the talent displayed within the story. Rather, their reasoning was mainly based on poor timing as the day it was read before the committee, Banville died (Bird vii). Additionally, the reading committee believed that their paying public seemed to be tiring of *commedia dell'arte* based stories.

Rostand's reaction to the rejection was to try again. This time, however, Rostand would compose a three-act play that would serve as more than just a curtain raiser. The title was *Les Romanesques*, more commonly recognized in the English-speaking world as *The Romantics* or in its later incarnation of *The Fantasticks*, a musical adaptation of the play by Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones which premiered on Broadway in 1960 (*The Fantasticks Website*). The play was delivered to the Comédie-Française within a few days of the birth of Rostand's first son, Maurice who would grow up to become a moderately successful poet and playwright in his own right (Hamilton 25-26).

The action of the first act of *Les Romanesques* follows Percinet and Sylvette, two young lovers who live next door to each other, but who are separated by their feuding fathers. What the children do not realize is that their fathers are actually close friends and the paternal argument is just a ruse to encourage their love. The fathers hire Straforel, a clever bandit, to orchestrate (both literally and figuratively) a fake abduction of Sylvette. Percinet saves her and all is forgiven. In act two, though, the children find out about their father's plan and Sylvette, disillusioned by the deception, calls off the marriage. In his anger, Percinet ventures into the wide world to prove himself a man. In the third and final act, Straforel is clever enough to teach Sylvette a lesson in love, where she realizes her mistake in refusing Percinet. Meanwhile, Percinet returns having suffered sufficiently at the hands of the world. The young lovers realize that their concern for each other was real. Straforel collects his payment, having successfully united the lovers, and the play concludes with a lyrical epilogue summarizing the show.

Regrettably, the reading committee of the Comédie-Française also rejected *Les Romanesques*, this time because the play was too long. Facing revisions he was loathe to make, Rostand suffered his first serious bout with depression, a problem that would plague him all his life. Eventually the suggestion was made to simply read the play faster to the committee of *Sociétaires* (Lloyd 66). As a result, the play was accepted and eventually premiered at the Comédie-Française in May of 1894. Rostand's involvement with multiple aspects of production is well known. For *Les Romanesques*, Rostand was allowed to help with the design and construction of the scenery (72). The play was received warmly both by audiences and critics alike. The *Académie française* named the work "best play by a newcomer at the Comédie-Française" (76). The play was soon

translated into English as well as German. Despite its initial popularity, today, *Les Romanesques* is best remembered as the source material for the 1960 musical adaptation.

In *Les Romanesques*, the theme of the *õidealö* being preferable to reality is seen in the disappointment and disillusionment of the young lovers upon learning the truth behind their romance. Rostand would continue to explore this conflict of ideal versus reality in succeeding works. His next play, *La Princesse lointaine* is arguably the most direct representation of this repeat motif. In it, Rostand dramatizes the legend of a prince, Joffroy Rudel, who falls in love with a princess he has never met named Melissinde. Having heard of her beauty and accomplishments, Rudel has courted her through letters, song, and poetry. This four-act play begins with Rudel finally making the voyage to meet Melissinde, as he is fatally ill and wishes to see her prior to his death.

ERASMUS. Two years, exalting her in speech and song,  
His frame grew weaker as his love grew strong.  
At last,ô set sail, knowing his end was near,  
Lest he see Death, not having seen his dear! (Norman 1:70)

The ship carrying Rudel has been damaged by rough seas and attacked by pirates. Even though the prince grows increasingly ill as they approach Tripoli, Rudel encourages his men to press on. Upon their arrival, Bertrand, Rudel's loyal friend and a fellow crusader, volunteers to retrieve the Princess and bring her back to the dying prince. Rudel's dreams are threatened when Bertrand arrives at the palace of the princess. After fighting his way to her chamber (she is guarded by a jealous, loveless fiancé), Bertrand discovers that he too is in love with Melissinde. Their loyalty to Rudel's idea of pure and holy love conflicts with their own selfish desires, and both are thrown into despair. The plot is further complicated when word reaches Rudel, via the scheming merchant Squarciafico, of their betrayal. Rudel refuses to believe Squarciafico, and eventually Bertrand and

Melissinde choose to honor Rudel rather than give into their mutual attraction. In a scene that mirrors the final act of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Melissinde is brought to the ship where she comforts the prince, proclaiming her true love for him as he dies in her arms.

Melissinde and Bertrand have been redeemed through Rudel's faith in their devotion to him; Rudel's ideal love has won.

Certainly, the plot, characters, and theme of *La Princesse lointaine* foreshadow *Cyrano de Bergerac*, but it was the connections made in the process of producing *La Princesse lointaine* that had a huge impact in the future of both Rostand's career in the theatre and the success of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. After achieving a modicum of success with *Les Romanesques*, "Rostand's growing reputation was such . . . that he was able to offer his next play to Sarah Bernhardt at the peak of her fame" (Freeman 13). As a result of their meetings, Rostand and Bernhardt (1844-1923) struck up a working relationship and, eventually, a deep friendship that would span the rest of Rostand's career.

Bernhardt's influence in the world of French theatre was unparalleled at the time and her association with the young writer would catapult him to stardom. In exchange for Bernhardt's support, Rostand would write plays that would showcase her dramatic talents—the first of which was *La Princesse lointaine*. For the first official reading of the completed play, Bernhardt assembled her company of actors which included a young man named Jean Coquelin. Jean's father, a longtime colleague and friend of Bernhardt's, was also invited to the reading. His name was Constant Coquelin—the man who would one day originate the role of Cyrano.

Coquelin (1841-1909) was immediately taken with the young poet's talent. After hearing the reading of *La Princesse lointaine*, Coquelin "was so deeply impressed by its

beauty that he invited Rostand to write a piece for himö (Wilson xii). The result, of course, would be *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In the meantime, however, Rostand and Bernhardt focused their efforts on mounting *La Princesse lointaine* at Bernhardt's Renaissance Theatre. It opened on April 5, 1895 to mixed reviews. It seems that the tragic tone of *La Princesse lointaine* caught viewers off-guard, who expected another light-hearted comedy like *Les Romanesques*. This misconception of the playwright's style as well as numerous lukewarm reviews hurt the play's chances for success. *La Princesse lointaine* closed less than a month after its premiere.

The failure of *La Princesse lointaine* to become a critical and commercial success affected Rostand deeply. He withdrew into himself, suffering a long bout of depression marked by reclusiveness and a lack of creative productivity. Bernhardt, on the other hand, worked ceaselessly to encourage the young playwright and commissioned another play, *La Samaritaine*, to be performed during Holy Week the following yearö (Lloyd 98-99). Bernhardt saw the potential in Rostand and would not let him give up. However, when the play opened on April 14, 1897, it was not a critical success. Edward Bird suggests that the author's romantic treatment of a sacred subject proved problematic: "For a story drawn from one of the most moving and poetic pages in the Bible, Rostand's language is too lyrical and frequently too *précieux* for the simplicity of the subjectö (viii). Nevertheless, *La Samaritaine* proved popular with audiences, drawing a respectable financial profit.

*La Samaritaine* is loosely based on the account of the Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well in the Book of John. The account from the gospel "seemed to offer [Rostand] the theme of the quest of the Ideal in a world of fragile faithö (Freeman

16). Presented in three tableaux, instead of acts, the action of the story focuses on Photine, the Samaritan woman, and her encounter with Jesus Christ at the well and her resultant efforts to bring the good news to her town of Sichem. The first tableau, set at the well, introduces the audience to the disgruntled citizens of the town. Jesus and his disciples approach the area, only to be dismissed by those present. When Photine comes to the well to draw water, Jesus asks for a drink. The rest of the first tableau follows the gospel account closely, ending with Photine listening intently to the lessons of the Christ. The second part takes place in Sichem, where Photine tries earnestly to bring those in the city out to the Messiah to hear his teaching. Ridiculed by the priest who believes her to be beyond the hope of righteousness, Photine surprises him by confessing her sins and emphasizing the importance of love and faith.

PHOTINE. Love, love, love always. Heaven is only love.  
"My Father loves the loving." And He said,  
"Give all things for love." (Norman 1:185)

As a result of her boldness, Photine is almost arrested by a Centurion for sedition but released when it is determined that Jesus is no threat. Rejoicing, she leads her people out to the well. In the final tableau, Photine brings the town to Jesus where they receive his blessing. The play ends with Photine reciting the Lord's Prayer and the crowd responding with amen.

Whether or not Rostand incorporated his own personal faith into *La Samaritaine* is something of a mystery. His mother and sisters were devout Catholics as was his wife, but Rostand seems to have shunned the church, refusing to attend mass. According to his friend Jules Renard, Rostand used to make fun of Rosemonde for "trying to believe" (qtd. in Lloyd 121). This would seem to imply that Rostand was at the very least an agnostic,

if not an atheist. On the other hand, Rostand was extremely generous to those in need, and his writing, in general, does emphasize spiritual aspects such as the soul, God, heaven, and hell. Additionally, a common theme in Rostand's works is the redemptive power of a pure and holy (ideal) love. With *La Samaritaine*, Rostand's portrayal of Jesus is compassionate, forgiving, patient, and omniscient. Whether this was a reflection of his personal faith or a theologically informed characterization remains unknown.

The success of *La Samaritaine* was providential in many aspects. Financially, it enabled Rostand to rent a modest villa outside of Paris where he could focus on completing his next play. Emotionally, it sent Rostand into a manic phase where inspiration flowed. Rostand's son, Maurice, would later recall, "As soon as the premiere of the play [*La Samaritaine*] was over, my father went back to work. He worked ceaselessly. . . his whole life was given over to his work, and that work never stopped!" (qtd. in Lloyd 127). All thoughts and actions were devoted to his next piece, the masterpiece *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

Working feverishly, Rostand would often complete a scene and immediately dispatch it to his friend Constant Coquelin, who would be playing the title role. Together they had agreed that the play would make its debut at the Porte-Saint-Martin, the boulevard theatre where Coquelin primarily worked. Though it is likely that the Comédie-Française would have accepted the new work, Rostand would have had to sacrifice too much to have them produce it. In addition to enduring the lengthy approval process, he would have had to give up Coquelin as the actor had severed all ties with the state theatre that once employed him ("Benoît-Constant Coquelin"). Rostand steadfastly believed that Coquelin was the only actor who could successfully embody the soul of

poet-swordsman. The character of Cyrano proved to be the most celebrated role of Coquelin's career.

Rostand had been diagnosed as early as 1896 as being neurasthenic, i.e. depressive and began to have panic attacks as work continued on the show (Woollen ix). As the premiere rapidly approached, Rostand grew increasingly anxious and convinced himself that the production would prove to be a catastrophic failure. Many of the actors, contracted to the show, shared similar doubts, including the young actress playing Roxane a woman named Maria Legault, [who] would only sign up for a week, which was how long she expected the play to last (Lloyd 136). Rostand himself could not bring himself to participate as a member of the audience for the first performance. Rather, Rostand chose to costume himself as a seventeenth-century marquis and joined the extras on stage in Act One (137). The playwright had chosen this approach to the premiere for two reasons. First, he was decidedly unhappy with the blocking at the opening of the show and hoped to direct the movements of the supernumeraries from onstage. Secondly, Rostand knew that if he concentrated on the staging and characterization from within the show, his attention would not be focused on the audience and their reactions to his work. His concerns were unfounded.

The premiere of *Cyrano de Bergerac* on December 28, 1897, is perhaps one of the most famous theatrical debuts in French theatre history. The audience reacted with enthusiastic approval and applause at the end of each act. Rostand was reluctantly persuaded by Coquelin to take a bow at the end of the third act, overwhelmed by demands for the author. At the conclusion of the show, the curtain was raised more than forty times for encore curtain calls. The effect was immediate. William Phelps writes



that Rostand lifted the French drama and the French spirit out of the Slough of Despond—a reference to the low morale and guilty conscience that had plagued the French since the end of the Franco-Prussian War (Phelps 261). Sue Lloyd remarks that Rostand's play had reawakened, just as he had hoped to do, the traditional Gallic spirit of heroism and chivalry: a tremendous feeling of national pride had swept through those present. At one point the audience even sang the Marseillaise (Lloyd 138). On the second night, Rostand was awarded the title *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* by the French government—an honor received in the dressing room between acts, witnessed by his entire family.

Critically, *Cyrano de Bergerac* garnered the praise of most every Parisian columnist. All the reviews drew attention to Rostand, citing him as a poet with an extraordinary talent. Émile Faguet, a critic who wrote for the *Journal des Débats*, even requested that Rostand immediately begin to write his next play—one that would again emphasize the superiority of France. He wrote, "Let Monsieur Rostand, without haste, make use of his marvelous gifts. May he give us . . . exquisite things which such a work promises" (qtd. in Lloyd 141). The problem with such praise was the insurmountable expectation and demand it placed on Rostand. Following the success of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Rostand would never again be the prolific, disciplined writer he once was. Rather, he would be hindered by a crippling perfectionism that feared unfavorable criticism and ridicule.

The firestorm of publicity that *Cyrano de Bergerac* received after its premiere ensured that the show would sell out for months to come. That popular success afforded Rostand lasting financial security in addition to making him an instant, albeit reluctant,

celebrity. Likewise, Coquelin would find himself in the role for which he would forever be identified, a role which he would revive time and time again both at home and on tour internationally. Printings of the play repeatedly sold out. Abroad, *Cyrano de Bergerac* was translated into English, Italian, German, and Dutch within the year. The play also inspired several satirical knockoffs, parodies, songs, musical comedies and operas— a standard that would follow with each of his subsequent plays.

Sarah Bernhardt commissioned Rostand's next project for exhibition at the World's Fair in 1900. The chosen subject was François Bonaparte, the exiled son of Napoleon Bonaparte. The play's title would be called *L'Aiglon*, The Eaglet— the name François Bonaparte was known by in his native France. Rostand threw himself into researching his subject. Bernhardt, Rostand and his family even traveled abroad to investigate the world in which the Duke of Reichstadt, Bonaparte's Austrian title, lived. He visited the Duke's palace of Schoenbrunn, and with characteristic thoroughness made minute observations of the furniture and military uniforms of the period (Wilson xiv). Inspiration flagged, though, and Rostand often found himself dodging inquiries from Bernhardt about the status of the play. Bernhardt would actually begin rehearsals in November of 1899 without a finished script. Reluctantly, Rostand joined the rehearsal process, splitting his time between directing, designing, and completing the last act of the play. Rostand often worked on rewrites in the evening which he distributed the following day in rehearsal, slowing the process. The premiere was further delayed when Rostand became seriously ill with a bronchial infection around Christmas. *L'Aiglon* would not premiere until March of 1900, barely in time for the Paris Exhibition.

The action of *L'Aiglon* follows the young Bonaparte in exile in Austria. The first act focuses on convincing the young Bonaparte to return to France and to stage a coup to regain rule. He declines on the grounds of inexperience: he is a man more interested in fashion than government. In the second act, Bonaparte, beginning to show the signs of tuberculosis, is caught in a network of revolutionaries who wish to instate him as emperor of France. One of these is Flambeau, an ally who will be the fire, the inspiration, and the muscle behind the sensitive, slight, and noncommittal Bonaparte. The two men conspire to make one ideal leader, an echo of the relationship between Cyrano and Christian.

As the action continues, Bonaparte fails an attempt to win over his grandfather, the Emperor of Austria. Bolstered by Flambeau, Bonaparte proceeds with the plan. In the penultimate act, the revolutionaries meet on an historic battleground but are discovered before they can flee. Flambeau kills himself rather than face imprisonment. The duke, left alone, hallucinates, seeing numerous dead soldiers from his father's military campaigns. He accepts that his life will be nothing more than a shadow of his father's career and offers his meager life in payment for all the souls lost.

THE DUKE. But I know. I am offertory.  
All was not paid. But I complete the price.  
I had to find this field of sacrifice.  
This last, last service only I could render! (Norman 2:186)

Bonaparte dies on his father's French military cot before being dressed as an Austrian for burial in the sixth and final act of the play.

*L'Aiglon* premiered on March 17, 1900 with Bernhardt playing the title role. Bernhardt was famous for her "trouser roles," and the Duke of Reichstadt was no exception. Though written for Coquelin, the role of Flambeau was actually performed by

Lucien Guitry. Coquelin refused to commit to the play, apparently reluctant to take on a supporting role. Nevertheless, critics were united in their praise of Bernhardt's performance. Rostand, however, was faulted for using lofty, romantic verse to tell such a solemn story. Other critics pointed to the many distracting subplots and criticized the length of the play. Still others thought it self-indulgent. In spite of the criticism, the play became a commercial success, tapping into the Parisian's pride of their country's history, and performances were booked through the end of the year.

During the Paris Exposition, Rostand's fame was at its height. The Comédie-Française had revived *Les Romanesques*, Coquelin was playing *Cyrano de Bergerac* in the boulevards, and Bernhardt continued to play *L'Aiglon* to packed houses at her new theatre. Ironically, Rostand was unable to enjoy his international success due to his health. Rostand's bronchial infection, which had delayed *L'Aiglon* rehearsals, had deteriorated into pneumonia by the end of March (Lloyd 180). He was eventually forced out of Paris, on doctor's orders, and spent a majority of the fall convalescing in the Pyrenees. Rostand would fall in love with the location and eventually make the small town of Cambo-Les-Bains his permanent home.

In 1901, Rostand was elected to the *Académie française*, though he would not officially accept the position for a few years. He continued to put off writing his acceptance speech as well as the trip to Paris for the ceremony and reception, reluctant to leave the peaceful climate of his new home in Cambo. When Rostand finally returned to Paris in May of 1903, he was inundated by socialites, artists, dignitaries, and strangers—many of whom would stand outside his residence, waiting to catch a glimpse of France's famous son. Rostand's official induction ceremony into the *Académie française* took

place on June 4, witnessed by his family, Bernhardt, and Coquelin among others. Rostand's remarks to the Académie praised the sacred origins of the theatre and emphasized the importance of the dramatic and ideal art form. Rostand's desire to reinvigorate the theatre with Romantic passion and power comes through in his speech. He declared, "We need a theatre where, inspiring us with beauty, consoling us with grace, poets, without doing it on purpose, give us lessons for the soul. That is why we need a theatre which is not only poetic, but heroic" (qtd. in Lloyd 215). Rostand's speech is important because it further reinforces the themes and ideas that he sets forth in his plays, namely those of passion, courage, and ideal love.

Those themes would once again be featured in Rostand's next work, *Chantecler*. *Chantecler* was written, again, with Coquelin in mind (Wilson xv). However, with this play, more than any other, Rostand's creativity was buffeted by depression and long periods of procrastination. He begged Coquelin to remain quiet about the play until it was finished, but Coquelin was impatient. In an effort to speed up the delivery, Coquelin leaked word that Rostand was writing a new play, especially designed for him (Lloyd 231). The press immediately seized upon the story, but much to everyone's dismay, no play was forthcoming. Rostand's reaction to the news was to retreat further away from Parisian society and to avoid Coquelin as much as possible. Literary circles, journals, and newspapers reacted negatively to the delay, cynically ridiculing any announcement or rumor of the work.

Rostand refused to release the play for rehearsal until he was satisfied with the final product; he would spend ten years writing and revising the play (Amoia 20). All the characters in *Chantecler* are animals; the hero is a rooster who is famous for his crowing

abilities. Ironically, it was his most personal composition, and ultimately more of a dramatic poem than an action-filled play. However, the title character still espouses the themes and inspirational ideals that are found in all of Rostand's work. Chantecler exemplifies the virtues of hard work, serves as a reminder of the beauty and authenticity of nature, and reiterates that constant vigilance is required to fight the pernicious contemporary attitudes of cynicism, boredom, the sense of purposelessness, and the lack of wonder (Lloyd 249). Many consider this final product his masterpiece.

The story, after a brief prologue encouraging the audience's imagination, follows the rooster, Chantecler and his exploits around the farmyard and abroad in the wild. According to Edward Bird, *Chantecler . . . is reminiscent of Aristophanes' Birds* (ix). Through four acts, this poet-rooster attempts to fulfill his duty, inspire others, and educate his colleagues in their work. Chantecler believes, erroneously, that he banishes the night with his call for the sun, which rises on his command. This is his glory, his secret. His work is threatened by the jealousy of other malicious inhabitants of the farmyard and also when he falls in love with a wild pheasant, which he follows back into the wild. She alone is able to withdraw the secret from him. The pheasant becomes envious of Chantecler's devotion to both his duty and the sun, so she distracts him one morning. The sun rises before he calls, and Chantecler is humbled and disheartened.

PHEASANT. What now?

CHANTICLEER. My task.

The trail! It's all I ask.

Lead on!

PHEASANT. What are you going to do?

CHANTICLEER. My task! (Norman 2:365)

In his hurt, Chantecler refuses to give up his song and returns to the farmyard to continue his work, his task.

The premiere of *Chantecler* was continually delayed, due primarily to Rostand's perfectionism and his struggle with poor health and depression (Woollen x). Almost every year, Coquelin announced it as a part of his company's season, only to withdraw the announcement when no play was forthcoming and replace it with *Cyrano de Bergerac*. By December 1908, however, the play was finally completed and rehearsals began in earnest. Coquelin was, by this time, quite unwell, having exhausted himself with touring, promoting, and performing for most of his adult life. On January 27, 1909, the premiere of *Chantecler* was indefinitely delayed when Coquelin died suddenly of a heart attack (Lloyd 244). Rostand was devastated and firmly believed he held some responsibility for his friend's death. It was Coquelin's son Jean who pressed forward on production and eventually found a replacement for his father in a popular boulevard actor named Lucien Guitry.

There was much working against *Chantecler* before it premiered. The changes in casting, difficult personalities within the cast, the weight of the costumes, and the style of the acting all served to create discord amongst those involved with the production. Doubts ran high, even though Rostand himself was directing the production. The play finally opened in the first weeks of February in 1910 to enthusiastically full houses but usually received a lukewarm response at the final curtain. Critical reviews were primarily positive, nonetheless. Most critics realized that *Chantecler* was more poem than play and a little ahead of its time. As a result, *Chantecler* became a commercial success. It played continuously throughout the year and toured with four separate troupes across the country. This popularity, nevertheless, did little to silence those who were extremely and virulently critical of the play, labeling it a failure. According to N. Scarlyn

Wilson, the hostile criticism was encouraged both by the exasperating but unavoidable delay in production and by the satirical references to certain literary groups thinly disguised in the third act (xvi). Though Rostand took these reviews personally, he continued to defend the work, believing that the piece had real merit. The playwright felt that, with a different cast and a more symbolic concept, the play would be spellbindingly successful. He was right, though the production he dreamed of would never be realized in his lifetime.

*Chantecler* would be Rostand's last full-length work to be performed while he was alive. The playwright would continue to write both poems and plays in the years that followed, but he would finish few. Nonetheless, many ideas found their way to paper. Among those was a translation of *Faust*, a play about the puppet Polichinelle, and perhaps his last great work *La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan* (Lloyd 302). The three plays were meant to be part of an epic trilogy, though this was never to be the case. *La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan* was his final play, and one Rostand felt more suited for reading than for production. Technically, it was never completed to Rostand's liking especially the prologue. Thematically, the play presents a shift heretofore unseen in Rostand's heroes. Don Juan, unlike Cyrano or Chantecler, has become jaded, disillusioned, and cynical by his life experiences. He rejects the ideal in favor of his self-sufficiency and pride.

*La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan* recounts the story of the notorious womanizer's judgment before he is carted off to everlasting damnation. He will spend perpetuity, not in the flames of hell, but as a puppet where others will use and control him (Woollen x). Interestingly, the play begins and ends with a puppet show. In the beginning, it is the



puppet Polichinelle (Punch) who, during a show, warns Don Juan about the imminent arrival of the devil for Don Juan's soul. Don Juan is neither upset nor afraid but rather proud of all his accomplishments, having seduced over a thousand women in his lifetime. The play then becomes a battle of wits between Don Juan and the devil. For every accusation the devil presents to Don Juan, the title character has an alternative view of the sin—each one remembered with pride and boasting. The devil even calls up the souls of the women he has betrayed, asking Don Juan to name them all. When Don Juan cannot, he defends himself by saying he at least conquered them with pleasure. Don Juan's list of excuses cannot support his crimes and at last he is forced to admit defeat. He has done nothing creative in his life, nothing worthwhile. However, Don Juan refuses to fear the sufferings of hell and decides to accept his punishment with dignity. The devil, in a surprising twist, then informs Don Juan that he is not worthy of hell and will spend the rest of his life as a puppet. Don Juan resists to no avail and is seen as a puppet in the final moments of the play (Lloyd 304-308). Undeniably Rostand's darkest play, *La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan* would not premiere until 1922, four years after Rostand's death. Though well-received by critics, the play was unpopular with audiences and closed shortly after.

During Rostand's final years, troubles seemed to mount while his health steadily declined. His marriage would disintegrate, damaged by infidelity and mistrust on both sides. Rostand's relationship with his eldest son Maurice would also sour due to the young man's open homosexuality. Though the playwright would continue to be honored by the state, receiving Commander of the Legion of Honor in August of 1913, Rostand preferred to live outside the lights and social intrigues of Paris. Instead, he would remain

rather reclusive in his estate of Arnaga in Cambo. Only France's entry into World War I in July of 1914 would revive Rostand's dormant sense of patriotism and creative energies (Amoia 21). He returned to Paris, offered his services to the war, and tirelessly wrote letters to and inspirational poems for the soldiers on the front lines. Forced out of Paris by the advancing Germans, Rostand focused on volunteering at provincial hospitals.

The years of the war were personally very difficult for Rostand. He lost both his father and mother to illness as well as suffered the premature deaths of many dear friends and artistic colleagues to the war. Finally, in 1918, life seemed to return to some sense of normalcy. The end of the war was close at hand and Rostand had found love again in the arms of a young actress named Mary Marquet (Lloyd 321). In the fall, he returned to Paris, against the warnings of his doctor who feared the continuing Spanish flu epidemic. Rostand's desire to be a part of the armistice celebrations outweighed his fears. He even returned to work with his beloved Sarah Bernhardt, directing a revival of *L'Aiglon*. The fears of Rostand's doctor, however, were well founded. Rostand soon contracted the Spanish flu which developed into double pneumonia (334). Though there were short-lived rallies in his battle against the infection, Rostand eventually succumbed on December 2, 1918, just two weeks after contracting the disease. Rostand was buried alongside his mother and father in Marseilles, the town of his birth.

#### *Cyrano de Bergerac, 1619-1655*

The historical Cyrano de Bergerac owes much of his fame to the fictitious story created by Rostand. The real man was an unsuccessful satirist, known more for his libertine lifestyle and atheist leanings than for his artistry. Born March 6, 1619, Savinien de Cyrano was actually a native of Paris (Addyman 23). Bergerac was actually the name

of a small fief owned by the Cyrano family on the outskirts of Paris. When Savinien de Cyrano adopted the name Bergerac later in life, he presumably welcomed the association with Gascony and did little to correct the mistaken assumption that he was from Bergerac. In fact, Edward Bird makes the argument that "the real Cyrano's character [was] essentially Gascon in nature," as he was defiantly proud and impetuous (x). As a boy in school, Cyrano would become acquainted with Henri Le Bret, his lifelong friend. Le Bret would ultimately be Cyrano's only contemporaneous biographer. Most of what we know about Cyrano is drawn from Le Bret's brief study, published as the *Préface* to Cyrano's *Les États et Empires de la Lune* in 1657 (Bird xiv, Woollen xv).

Cyrano was a noted atheist, due to the bitter treatment he received at the hands of the clergy during his schooling. He found the country priest, who taught him during his young years, to be overly strict and largely ignorant. When transferred to the Collège Beauvais around the age of eleven, Cyrano was put under the tutelage of "Jean Grangier, a pedant whom he learned to despise and later ridiculed in his play [*Le Pédant joué*]" (Bird x). Cyrano ultimately rebelled against his strict upbringing. Upon leaving school, he seems to have spiraled into a libertine lifestyle filled with hard drinking, gambling, and sinister associations with men of ill repute.

Various written accounts emphasize Cyrano's predisposition to dueling and the notoriety he received from the fights. Most agree that these "duels were not always to defend himself but more often his friends, for whom he frequently served as second" (Butler 233-234). His reputation as a fierce fighter did much to recommend him to the service of Carbon de Castel-Jaloux in the Thirty Years War as well. Ultimately it was Le Bret who was responsible for encouraging Cyrano to join the guards, as it was a source of

steady income. Le Bret's intentions, however, were evidently grounded in the fact that Cyrano had chosen to lead a dissolute life of pleasure which caused his good friend . . . considerable concern (Bird x). In 1640, Cyrano, Le Bret, and Christophe de Neuville (not Christian, as in the play) fought at the Siege of Arras where Neuville was killed. The conditions illustrated in Rostand's play seem to mirror the reality of history as the troops were trapped for two weeks without provisions, water was scarce and sanitary conditions appalling (Addyman 91). The French eventually rallied to take Arras, though Cyrano received a serious sword wound to his throat. Le Bret, in his biography, reveals that "Cyrano's war wounds [were] an important element in his decision to leave the army" (93). Although the fictional Cyrano bears little resemblance to his historical counterpart, several anecdotes from the satirist's post-army life make an appearance in the play.

After leaving the army and returning to Paris, Cyrano chose to focus his energies on writing and furthering his education, but this time on his terms. He became a student of Pierre Gassendi, a celebrated philosopher and physician, who encouraged the study of Neo-Materialism and Epicureanism (Butler 235). Cyrano also took lessons in fencing and dancing, so as to better pass himself off as a gentleman. He seemed to favor the company of poets, playwrights, philosophers, and other influential, independent men of means. His preferences may have been romantically motivated. According to Addyman, "certain references and jokes within Cyrano's works, as well as the comments of some of his contemporaries, do seem to point to his having been involved in one or more passionate same-sex relationships" (Addyman 211). During Rostand's time, however, it was generally accepted that Cyrano was simply waiting for the ideal woman. The

distinction is ultimately hard to prove as no solid evidence exists either way, and what clues might have been in his own work were heavily censored after his death by Le Bret.

Although Le Bret was historically responsible for publishing most of Cyrano's work, Cyrano did find patronage in the Duke of Arpajon. The Duke enabled Cyrano to publish his *Oeuvres diverses* and funded a production of his tragedy *La Mort d'Agrippine* (Bird xii). The play ran for a short while at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1653 before his enemies wrongfully condemned it as being blasphemous. As a result, Cyrano fell out of favor with the Duke and was dismissed from the household.

By this point, Cyrano was seriously ill, possibly having contracted syphilis from his sexual exploits (Woollen xii). His death, however, was hastened by the famous accident: a timber was dropped upon his head one day as he attempted to reenter the Duke's palace. Le Bret made sure he was transported to a convent where he was indeed attended by his cousin, Madeleine Baronne de Neuville, who had taken the veil after her husband's death. Cyrano, contrary to the play, actually left the convent, presumably wearied of the constant attempts to convert him. He traveled to another cousin's home, where he subsequently died. Le Bret would publish the rest of Cyrano's work posthumously, including his satirical letters and his science fiction novels *Les États et Empires de la Lune* and *Les États et Empires du Soleil*.

It is interesting to note that, while Rostand focused on the ideal hero and lover as exemplified in the character of Cyrano de Bergerac, the historical counterpart was writing about ideal societies in his *Les États et Empires de la Lune* and *Les États et Empires du Soleil*. Both works, often translated as *Voyage to the Moon* and *Voyage to the Sun*, dealt with Utopian societies. These two novels are those on which Cyrano's modern

reputation as a courageous freethinker rests (Freeman 19). In them, Cyrano created fictionalized civilizations thick with natural beauty where people admired well-endowed noses, openly debated matters of science, and, in certain cultures, were subject to the rule of tolerant and understanding birds. On the moon, personal freedom was a man's most prized possession, a value that would later be emphasized in Rostand's play and title character.

#### *Sources for Cyrano de Bergerac*

Rostand thoroughly researched his chosen subject. He pulled heavily from seventeenth century writings, criticisms, and legends surrounding the real man. Rostand would weave together Cyrano's own literary endeavors, friends and relatives of the writer, famous contemporaries, and notable events including the historic Siege of Arras in which Cyrano fought. Rostand would additionally pull from an early nineteenth century essay by Théophile Gautier, which further exaggerated the exploits of the man as well as the length of his nose. What makes *Cyrano de Bergerac* so interesting, however, are the elements of Rostand's own life which he apparently incorporated when creating characters and plot points for his masterpiece.

Through the course of the drama, Rostand makes many literary references to the works of Cyrano de Bergerac. These included his plays, his novels, and his satirical attack on the actor Montfleury in the form of a letter entitled *Contre le gras Montfleury, mauvais auteur et comédien* (Bird xiii). Though the original source of the vitriolic attack on Montfleury is unknown, most historians agree that "the great actor spoke disdainfully of Cyrano's abilities as a playwright and therefore drew his ire (xiii). Rostand knew that Cyrano had attended one of Montfleury's plays and interrupted him

from the pit, demanding a one-month retirement from the fat actor, and expertly used the event as way to introduce Cyrano during the first act of the play.

Rostand also artfully incorporated Cyrano's masterpiece *Les États et Empires de la Lune* into the third act, when the fictional Cyrano must find a way to stall the persistent De Guiche by continually referencing his voyage to the moon. Though the scene's origin is lost on contemporary American spectators, the clever nod to the original work would have been understood and highly appreciated by the well-educated in Rostand's original audience. Rostand was also acquainted with Molière's flagrant use of a scene from Cyrano's *Le Pédant joué* in the successful *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. The use of this theatrical anecdote in the fifth act is made all the more ironic as the real Cyrano abhorred plagiarism above all things (Addyman 225). Rostand would weave this information into the final moments of the play, emphasizing yet another lost opportunity in the life of Cyrano.

In addition to the written works of Cyrano de Bergerac, there are several biographical events from Cyrano's life that are dramatized within Rostand's play. Most notable is the famous fight at the Porte de Nesle against one hundred men. According to Cyrano's biographer, Ishbel Addyman, there is no surviving record of the event current to the fight itself (5). Le Bret, however, makes specific note of the feat and lists reliable witnesses in his biography of the duelist. Historians disagree as to whether or not the historical Lignière was actually the poet Cyrano fought in defense of, but he seems the most likely candidate. The account of the story reveals that Cyrano killed two and wounded seven before the rest chose to flee the scene (Freeman 28). Rostand, in using the fight for dramatic purposes, actually played with the chronology of the event.

Historically, the incident at the Porte de Nesle happened some years after Cyrano had fought at the Siege of Arras.

Rostand based a majority of his characters on Cyrano's family and contemporaries. Cyrano did have a cousin named Madeleine Robineau (not Robin, as in the play) some years his senior. She was married to Christophe de Champagne, Baron de Neuville, for five years prior to his death at the Siege of Arras (Bird xvii). At the time of his death, she was heavily pregnant with their only child, who would ultimately be stillborn (Addyman 133). She retired to a convent and focused on charitable deeds for the remainder of her life. There is no evidence that Madeleine Robineau was the famous *précieuse* Roxane. Current scholarship seems to indicate that Rostand either confused Madeleine Robineau with Marie Robineau, a noted *précieuse*, or combined the two unrelated women into one ideal woman. Other contemporaneous individuals woven into the story include Ragueneau, Lignière, Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, Cuigy, Brissaille, Montfleury, Jodelet, Bellerose, Mother Marguerite, and the Count de Guiche, whose memoirs were instrumental in understanding the military operations of the day (Freeman 30). The Marshal of Gassion, mentioned in the second act of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, did indeed offer his patronage to Cyrano, but his offer was rejected in favor of independence. Years later, Cyrano would eventually accept the patronage of the Duke of Arpajon.

Though Rostand was known to have researched the life and works of Cyrano de Bergerac, he also consulted various historical writings, including *Dictionnaire des Précieuses* by Somaize (1660), Chappuzeau's *Théâtre français* (1674) as well as Achmet d'Héricourt's *Les Sièges d'Arras* (1845) (Freeman 35, 30). Yet the single most important, independent source for *Cyrano de Bergerac* was Théophile Gautier's *Les*



*Grotesques*. *Les Grotesques* is a colorful collection of essays centering on lesser-known writers from France's past. Originally published as a series of short articles in *La France Littéraire* between 1834 and 1835, they were eventually bound together as an independent publication in 1844 (Freeman 16). Gautier's work reads more like fiction, as it is obviously aggrandized for entertainment value. It is in *Les Grotesques* that Cyrano's nose and his aggressive defense of that appendage grew to legendary proportions.

Gautier writes:

But for his nose he would really be a handsome fellow. This unfortunate nose afforded Cyrano de Bergerac an opportunity of displaying his valour in duels which were repeated almost every day. If any one committed the mistake of looking at him and exhibiting the least astonishment at the sight of such a nose, he forthwith had to appear on the ground; and as the duels of that time did not finish up with breakfast, and Cyrano was a skilful swordsman, a man ran the risk of receiving a good sword-thrust in his belly and coming off with his doublet adorned with more buttonholes than it had before. (Gautier 165-166)

The rest of Gautier's work is largely a retelling of Le Bret's biographical portrait of the playwright and duelist. It covers his birth, education, debauchery, accusations of atheism, the attack against Montfleury, and longtime friendship with Le Bret. With delightful exaggeration, Gautier recalls the incident at the Porte de Nesle as if it were the pinnacle of Cyrano's numerous duels. Gautier describes the assailants as "[a] body of one hundred men" here one hundred men does not mean many men, but one hundred individuals" struck and insulted him" (Gautier 177). Cyrano was therefore justified, according to Gautier, in going mad with rage and sending his foes scampering away with fear. Gautier completes the biographical portrait by recounting Cyrano's service in the Siege of Arras, his rejecting the patronage of the Marshal of Gassion, his subsequent work for the Duke of Arpajon, and Cyrano's death. The last few pages of his essay are

entirely devoted to Cyrano's works and the theft executed by Molière, calling it "the most barefaced plagiarism possible" (189). Gautier praises *Les États et Empires de la Lune* and quotes scenes from both *Le Pédant joué* and *La Mort d'Agrippine* in an attempt to prove the playwright's skill. Gautier closes the essay, praising Cyrano for his inventive writing and madness, a sign of genius.

Though it is obvious that Rostand built his play upon the foundations laid by Cyrano, Le Bret, and Gautier, Rostand often dramatized personal events from his own life. For example, as an adolescent Rostand, much like Christian de Neuville, asked a classmate to compose a poem for him in order to impress a young girl he liked (Lloyd 11). Conversely, later on, Rostand himself was responsible for instructing a friend on how to win a woman who refused his advances. Rostand's efforts paid off and the couple, Jérôme Faduilhe and Maria Castaing, eventually married (49).

Another example from Rostand's own life mirrors a pivotal moment in the first act of the play. While on vacation in Luchon, the young Rostand was the mastermind of a practical joke. Rostand was incensed that a local priest was diverting a nearby stream into the church garden, where it created little waterfalls. The priest was charging admission to view the falls, in order to raise funds for the parish. Rostand, unaware of the purpose behind the fee, found the source of the stream and restored the water flow to its natural course. When Rostand's actions were discovered, the priest chastised the youth whereupon Rostand immediately handed over his meager savings to rectify the situation (15). The moment so closely parallels Cyrano's decision to reimburse the theatre managers that it seems likely that Rostand drew upon this particular memory for inspiration in his play.

It can also be argued that Rostand's own values, well known to his family and closest friends, are echoed in the rants and tirades of Cyrano. Rostand was, reportedly, fiercely independent and proud of his artistic endeavors. According to Sue Lloyd, Rostand refused to flatter well-connected individuals in the popular literary circles of Paris with the hope of gaining notoriety and frowned on those who did, including his wife and son Maurice (252). Rostand favored hard work, perseverance, and talent. These long-held beliefs are echoed in the play when Cyrano lectures Le Bret on his desire to be artistically independent of any man in the famous "Non, merci" monologue in the second act.

Scholars often suggest that Rostand took inspiration from individuals who shaped his young life as well. Characteristics of both Cyrano and Lignière are found in Rostand's dorm supervisor from his years at the Collège Stanislas. The man assigned to Rostand's class was nicknamed "Pif-Luisant" which means "shiny snout" a reference to the man's hard drinking, a means to cope with his failure to become a successful writer (25). Rostand honored Pif-Luisant by making him the subject of his poetry in *Les Musardises*. There are three dedicated to Pif Luisant, an ugly and grotesque figure to behold, but possessed of a beautiful and noble soul (Amoia 22). This unusual authority figure was often the subject of ridicule with the students. However, Rostand chose to befriend the man when he discovered their mutual love of poetry; Pif-Luisant even supplied Rostand with "forbidden works of the Romantic poet Alfred de Musset" (23). Rostand's actions seem to indicate that he looked beyond Pif-Luisant's appearance in exchange for the knowledge and love found within the man's soul.

Unlike the sensitive Pif-Luisant, the Colonel Villebois-Mareuil, a cousin to Rostand by marriage, was refreshingly outspoken and uninhibited. When Rostand accepted his position in the *Académie française*, he mentioned the close parallel between his cousin, a career military man, and theatre itself, noting that "both were larger than life and so able to take us out of ourselves, returning us afterward to everyday reality with renewed vigour and courage" (Lloyd 27). The brazen, candid personality that Villebois-Mareuil possessed in real life was transferred to Cyrano as well as the proud, martial minded individuals in the regiment of Gascon cadets.

Finally, in terms of subject and style, Rostand's work favors the early Romantics. His introduction to and continued interest in the works of Alexandre Dumas père and Victor Hugo influenced his work on *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* so captivated Rostand that he actually considered writing a play about D'Artagnan instead. Ultimately, however, Rostand would write about Cyrano de Bergerac. Cyrano possesses many of the same characteristics as D'Artagnan; they are both Gascons, exceptional fighters, and heroic protagonists. The exception, of course, is that D'Artagnan, being possessed of good looks, has numerous love affairs. D'Artagnan does appear in *Cyrano de Bergerac* but is relegated to a single line, praising Cyrano's duel in the first act.

Similarly, Hugo's "Preface to *Cromwell*," an academic defense of his Romantic play, seems to have made an impact on Rostand. Cyrano was the perfect combination of the sublime and the grotesque outlined in Hugo's preface. Rostand's character believes himself grotesque, fending off jests about his large nose with an equally striking temper. However, the sublime attributes of Cyrano balance the grotesque. Cyrano is romantic,

poetic, witty, athletic, and ultimately very selfless; he possesses all the qualities of a romantic hero (Wilson xiii). Cyrano, then, is the first character to embody both of Hugo's ideas so perfectly. The grotesque and the sublime complement each other in such a way that they beautifully emphasize the tragic nature of his story. He is the ideal Romantic hero.

### *The Importance of Cyrano de Bergerac at the fin de siècle*

The popularity of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, while undisputedly a masterwork by Rostand, can largely be attributed to the timing of its premiere. Two events darkened French national pride in the years that led up to the *fin de siècle*. First, the French had suffered a demoralizing defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1870 (Williams 164). In a conflict largely over the balance of power and grudges held against Napoleon III's misuse of German lands and people, the Prussian-German army had successfully marched against Paris, besieging the suburbs and cutting off all supply routes that fed Paris. The French were forced to seek terms of surrender in which the disputed regions of Alsace and Lorraine were lost to the Germans and a war indemnity exceeding a billion francs was to be shouldered by the recovering French government (Wawro 304-305). For France, who had been a major world player prior to the conflict, the loss was an unimaginable embarrassment. Prussia—a largely rural and geographically divided nation—had been grossly underestimated. The war had successfully united the German states, effectively shifting the balance of power away from France and creating a new European threat.

As the years passed, the French struggled to come to terms with the defeat, both financially and emotionally. In 1894, when the French discovered that someone in the

military was passing governmental secrets to the German embassy, the wound was reopened. The Dreyfus affair, as the scandal was named, centered on Captain Alfred Dreyfus— a Jewish officer mistakenly singled out as the perpetrator of the crime. He was put on trial using “highly circumstantial and partly false evidence” (Williams 165). Found guilty, Dreyfus was “subjected to public degradation and deported to Devil’s Island” (Sweetman 396). His conviction, with little to support his guilt, was largely the result of strong anti-Semitism found not only within the French government but the press as well (Williams 165). The scandal would bitterly divide Paris, especially after “Colonel Picquart, the investigating officer, had discovered evidence incriminating, not Dreyfus, but another officer called Esterhazy” (Lloyd 148). The government did not wish to reopen the investigation or retry Dreyfus, so Picquart was reassigned to Africa. Esterhazy was even hastily acquitted when Picquart refused to keep silent.

The affair, while dividing the whole country, would conversely unite many intellectuals and artists, called Dreyfusards. In her book *Theatre in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, Sally Debra Charnow writes that “[t]he Dreyfus Affair escalated the politicization of the world of arts and letters toward collective engagement within the national arena” (149). In an effort to clear Captain Dreyfus, various artists and writers would launch strong, articulate assaults through various publications against the French government. Notable Dreyfusards were novelist Émile Zola, actress Sarah Bernhardt, and even Edmond Rostand. Though Rostand wrote no editorials or letters against the French government, he did sign petitions and openly befriended Colonel Picquart, a man many believed to be nothing more than a turncoat (Lloyd 154). Ultimately, the efforts of the Dreyfusards would prevail. Twelve years after the initial accusation, Dreyfus would receive a full

pardon, though his name would always be attached to the scandal and rouse strong feelings that would continue to divide the French for decades.

*Cyrano de Bergerac* premiered in 1897 in the middle of the Dreyfus affair. The audience would be one who still suffered unconsciously from . . . an inferiority complex caused by the disasters of the Franco-Prussian War (Wilson xiv). It would, in some respects, restore France's pride in her past and in her military exploits. After Rostand's death, René Doumic, the playwright's former teacher, would observe that Rostand brought back to the literature of his country "l'héroïsme à la française" (qtd. in Wilson xvii). Rostand's work had successfully recalled, in the memories of the French, their former days of splendor and magnificence, while giving them hope for future glory.

Additionally, the play's success can in some ways be measured theatrically against the inundation of realism and naturalism that pervaded the Parisian stage at the *fin de siècle*. André Antoine had been instrumental in promoting the independent theatre movement, struggling to bring stark realism to the stage in France with works by playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and Émile Zola. Critical reaction, at the time, suggested that at least one factor in the public's overwhelming delight in *Cyrano de Bergerac* was precisely that it offered a welcome respite from such plays (Lloyd 147). Antoine, for his part, feared that the success of Rostand's play would mean a return to the Neo-Classical and Romantic theatre of the past. Antoine's fears, though, were unfounded, as Rostand's work did not lead to a resurgence of epic verse drama.

#### *Production History, Translation, and Critical Reception*

When *Cyrano de Bergerac* premiered in 1897, reviews were overwhelmingly enthusiastic of Rostand's accomplishment and Coquelin's performance. Articles that ran

in the *Journal des Débats*, the *Écho de Paris*, *Le Figaro*, and *Le Temps* all proclaimed the importance of such a play, one that harkened back to the country's glory years under Louis XIV (Lloyd 140-141). It was as if France herself had been revived by Rostand's epic tale of love and loss. The only unfavorable review appeared in the *Mercure de France*, an elitist symbolist revue (147). These symbolists had felt that Rostand was one of them prior to the premiere of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and felt utterly betrayed by the popularity of a Romantic comedy. Other attacks would follow later, when Émile Magne would release a series of articles entitled "Les Erreurs de documentation de *Cyrano de Bergerac*" in which he pointed out a plethora of anachronisms in Rostand's play (Lancaster 210). Rostand would defend his work, saying that he used artistic license in service of the story and knew of more inaccuracies than were even reported by Magne.

Max Beerbohm in London's *Saturday Review* gave the first English review in 1898. Beerbohm believed the play to be an instant classic, Cyrano to be a magnificent romantic hero, and an English translation to be wholly undesirable. Two years would pass before an English version would grace the London stage. Charles Wyndham performed the title role in April of 1900, in an unpublished translation by Louis Napoleon Parker and Stuart Ogilvie (Lloyd 146). A variety of English translations soon populated the market. Among those popular at the turn of the twentieth century were an American version in prose by Gertrude Hall and a British edition, in non-rhyming blank verse, by Gladys Thomas and Mary Guillemard (Taylor 1191).

The American actor Richard Mansfield bought the US rights to *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 1898. He would play Cyrano in an English translation by Howard Thayer Kingsbury and would perform the role close to four hundred times (Lloyd 146).



Coquelin would bring the original French version to the United States in 1900, at the invitation of Mansfield who would welcome the traveling actors to his own theatre. Interestingly enough, a lawsuit would be filed in the United States in June of 1899 creating an injunction against *Cyrano de Bergerac* performances for more than twenty years. Filed by an American playwright named Samuel Eberly Gross, the court documents claimed that Rostand had borrowed ideas for *Cyrano de Bergerac*, notably the balcony scene in Act Three, from Gross's own unsuccessful play *The Merchant Prince of Cornville* (Lloyd 209). By 1902, the Supreme Court of Illinois had no choice but to sustain Gross's accusation because no one from the Rostand camp came to the defense. As a result, Coquelin was prohibited from touring the United States with *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Mansfield also had to suspend his production which used a popular English translation of the play. The court's ruling would not be overturned until 1920.

Shortly after the court's reversal in 1920, a fresh crop of English translations would appear. The first version, by Henderson D. Norman, who used rhyming heroic couplets, was published in 1921 (Woollen xxvii). This was followed, in 1923, by Brian Hooker's rendition, which has proven both extremely popular and enduring. Critically, Anthony Burgess praised Hooker as a "skilled formalist," producing a "faithful and bold" version (qtd. in Taylor 1191). Conversely, Geoff Woollen labels Hooker's translation an "unhappy, actor-unfriendly" edition (xxvii). Whatever the shortcomings, Hooker's work served as the source text for both Walter Hampden's successful 1923 Broadway production (revived numerous times both on Broadway and on tour throughout the 1920s and 1930s) as well as the 1950 Hollywood screen adaptation starring José Ferrer.

Hooker's version was most recently used in a production by Houston's The Alley Theatre in November of 2008.

The original French version of the play would finally be produced by the Comédie-Française in 1939, signaling Rostand's belated acceptance by the establishment (Lloyd 345). This particular production, starring André Brunot in the role of Cyrano, would be revived yearly until 1953 (Woollen xxxiii). Ten years later, France's state theatre would present a new production starring Jean Piat. The Comédie-Française continues to revive the show often playing with the production's traditional setting (much as the Royal Shakespeare Company reinvents each subsequent production of a well-known Shakespearean play). The most recent production, as part of the 2008-2009 season, transposes the action of the play to the late nineteenth century, presumably as an exploration of Rostand's time.

The most recent English translations have been executed by British or Scottish authors. Anthony Burgess completed two translations. The first was commissioned by the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1971, and eventually became the basis for a Broadway musical simply entitled *Cyrano*. Since the first version was largely criticized for the cuts he made to the original story, Burgess stayed closer to the original for his second attempt, this time commissioned for the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1985 production (Taylor 1192). The translation mixes iambic pentameter blank verse with occasional free verse and no specific rhyme scheme. Burgess's work would eventually serve as the basis for the English subtitles in Jean-Paul Rappeneau's 1990 film as well (Woollen xxvii).

The first reviews of Burgess's translation come from a production mounted in the 1983-84 season of the Royal Shakespeare Company, which subsequently toured the United States. Criticisms of this production vary depending upon the reviewer. Frank Rich of *The New York Times* observed that there was "too much" going on, but ultimately praises its "theatrical extravagance" (1). Richard Corliss, of *Time Magazine*, had a much different opinion of the RSC's production. In an altogether unflattering review, Corliss faults the stage design as too monochromatic and plebian, the lighting as too dark, and the sound effects as too loud. He also finds Burgess's translation as well as Terry Hand's direction unromantic. He writes that the production "retreats from the play's signal qualities: passion and panache" (2). Finally, Corliss faults the casting, determining that Derek Jacobi is too slight to successfully carry the extraordinary presence of Cyrano.

One of the most recent productions of Burgess's translation was in the winter of 2007 on Broadway. Director David Leveaux and actor Kevin Kline collaborated to bring *Cyrano de Bergerac* to life at the Richard Rodgers Theater, which I saw on December 16, 2007. The production design was clean and sparse; the entire set resembled the inside of a brick warehouse with stairs descending in the back with a set of grand doors on stage left. Elements such as benches, chairs, tables, and trees were added for each scene as necessary as well as a variety of curtains to help distinguish the acts. The costumes were simple in line and texture, and the lights subtly varied the tone of each scene. In my opinion, Kevin Kline's Cyrano was dynamic and touching, and Chris Sarandon's Count de Guiche was a worthy antagonist. I was unmoved by Daniel Sunjata's portrayal of Christian; his acting was too small and realistic. Jennifer Garner, as Roxane, appears to

have been directed to lower her voice, which sounded altogether unnatural, and gesticulated to distraction. As a result, I never connected with her character and found her attempts at the style forced and unnatural. Professional critics also sounded their opinions.

*The New York Times* reviewer, Ben Brantley, had little to say of consequence. He was ultimately impressed by the simplicity of the production and Kline's understated performance. On the other hand, David Rooney of *Variety* faults the production for failing to give "much in the way of real passion" (1). While he admires the "painterly quality" of the set design, Rooney acknowledges that the play ultimately fails to live up to its design. He explains: "In contrast to the bold design statements, Leveaux imposes a modern, naturalistic feel on a play that should thrum with melodramatic grandness and hyperbole. It's all a little tame and sober" (2). While I disagree with Rooney's assessment of the set design, I understand his point about the realistic elements and the need for cohesive production values. Rooney's review illustrates the importance of an acting style that matches the subject matter. There is nothing small about *Cyrano*. Rostand did not set out to write a naturalistic play, and it is faulty logic to assume that strict realistic acting can support its content, scope, and power.

Other translations followed the popular Burgess edition. Christopher Fry's version was released in 1975. Written for Chichester's Festival Theatre and a production directed by José Ferrer, Fry used "rhyming (or 'chiming') couplets that were very well received by the critics" (Woollen xxvii). The most recent translation, however, comes from Scottish author Edwin Morgan who uses the "language of urban Glaswegian Scots" in iambic pentameter (Taylor 1192). Morgan has De Guiche speak proper English, to set

him apart from the rough brogue of the Gascons. This edition, first performed in 1992 by Scotland's Communicado Theatre Company under the direction of Gerry Mulgrew, won the Fringe First Award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

### *Adaptations*

*Cyrano de Bergerac* was translated and exported abroad shortly after its premiere. Simultaneously, it became the source material for a number of satirical parodies popular in the cafés and music halls of Paris. The play's success also financed international tours in the original French to several foreign countries, including the United States.

With the advent of the moving picture, *Cyrano de Bergerac* would find a much broader audience. Fittingly, Constant Coquelin would be the first Cyrano on film, though only in the context of his stage performance: the duel scene was shot for exhibition as a part of the World's Fair in 1900. In 1909, Bernhardt would record "the Nose Tirade" from *Cyrano de Bergerac* for Pathé, one of the first French film companies (Lloyd 248).

Full length cinematic versions of *Cyrano de Bergerac* have been produced intermittently since the 1920s. To adapt a play to film, the story is rewritten as a screenplay, often based upon Rostand's original script or a popular translation such as Hooker or Burgess. All the films are adaptations, usually the vision of a single director who oversees the production designer, the director of photography and the editor. Rostand's play, restructured to screenplay format, is usually edited for time; some versions even add new scenes or relocate old ones. Other films may be creative retellings of Rostand's play, updating the characters and scenarios to modern day equivalents.

Italian director Augusto Ginina was the first to actually produce the entire play as a silent film. According to the Internet Movie Database, the film was released in 1925

under the title *Cirano di Bergerac*. One of the most notable film adaptations was the 1950 American release directed by Michael Gordon and starring José Ferrer, who subsequently won the Academy Award for his portrayal. This version, written for the screen by Carl Foreman, was based on the Hooker translation. In 1990, the French director Jean-Paul Rappeneau brought an entirely French production to the big screen in his epic version starring Gerard Depardieu in the title role. Rappeneau added the fight at the Porte de Nesle and relocated the second act from Ragueneau's bakery to the barracks of the Cadets. The English subtitles for Rappeneau's film are based on the Burgess translation. In addition to the traditional versions, *Cyrano de Bergerac* has often been the subject of noteworthy cinematic retellings. Among them are Steve Martin's 1987 contemporized revision called *Roxanne*, in which Cyrano doppelganger Charlie D. Bales ends up getting the girl, while "Chris" happily moves on to find love with a waitress. The 1996 comedy *The Truth about Cats and Dogs* is a loose adaptation in which the traditional genders are reversed. It tells the story of a plain but popular radio personality, played by Janeane Garofalo. She has captured hearts on her radio show through her sexy voice and verbal banter but allows her attractive friend to imitate her when a handsome fan comes to the station.

*Cyrano de Bergerac* has also found its way into homes through radio and television. To use the term "adaptation" to describe these interpretations is not misleading; productions are often recorded or filmed over several performances and then edited together for the best results. Additionally, because a television audience is limited visually to what the camera has shot, they are receiving the story through a limited frame. Nevertheless, both radio and television adaptations have succeeded in distributing live

performances of Rostand's story to a wide audience. In England, actor Ralph Richardson transformed the role into an extremely popular radio program during the 1960s.

Television adaptations have displayed the talents of Peter Donat, Marsha Mason, Christopher Plummer and Derek Jacobi over the years. Most recently, on January 7, 2009, PBS broadcast its Great Performances series featuring the 2007 Broadway revival starring Kevin Kline, Jennifer Garner, and Daniel Sunjata. Two separate performances were filmed and edited together for the broadcast.

Rostand's play has also inspired adaptations in other performing arts: a kabuki play, ballets, operas, and musicals have all borne the name *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Lloyd 293). In *A Kabuki Reader: History and Performance*, James Brandon writes that the Japanese have rewritten European dramas according to the methods of Japanese theatre, such as Sawada Shōjirō's and Nukada Mutsutomi's 1926 *Shirano Benjūrō*, based on Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (347). Operatic variations have included a composition by Walter Damrosch, which had successful runs in both 1913 and 1939. Franco Alfano composed another operatic adaptation, which, though written in 1936, has enjoyed recent revivals at both the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 2005 and at Milan's La Scala in 2008, where Plácido Domingo starred as Cyrano. On Broadway, Christopher Plummer originated the title role in the musical version, simply entitled *Cyrano*, which was a critical and commercial flop playing for less than fifty performances in 1973. Another version by a Dutch composer premiered in 1993 was entitled *Cyrano: The Musical*. The production received lukewarm reviews and closed within six months. The varying levels of success reflected in these adaptations of *Cyrano de Bergerac* prove that, while

inspirational and commercially successful in its original form, altered copies of the play rarely stand up to the triumphs of the original.

### *Survey of Literature*

Most critical writings surrounding Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* have been in French. There is surprisingly very little written about the play in English, and the majority of those writings originate close to the time of the play's premiere. With the release of scholarly annotated editions of the script, critical introductions to the play, its author, and the historical *Cyrano de Bergerac* became available. Within recent years, two biographies have surfaced. The first, written by Sue Lloyd and published in 2003, centers on the life and writings of Edmond Rostand. The other, by Ishbel Addyman, focuses on piecing together what information is available on the historical *Cyrano de Bergerac* and was printed in 2008.

The first annotated script was published in 1930, edited and introduced by N. Scarlyn Wilson. His introduction briefly explores the life of Edmond Rostand, his literary career, the era in which he wrote, and his works. Wilson then goes on to piece together a short biography on the real *Cyrano de Bergerac*. While Wilson does an admirable job of concisely presenting the lives and influences of the two individuals, his scholarship has numerous errors. Though he correctly identifies the many historical inaccuracies in Rostand's own writing, Wilson names Roxane's husband of five years as Christian de Neuville, the character in the play. This is a mistake. Madeleine Robineau, *Cyrano's* cousin, was married to a Christophe de Neuville, not a Christian. He also places great emphasis on *Cyrano's* "huge, arrogant nose" as if it were fact and not the result of exaggeration (Wilson xviii). Wilson also makes no mention of *Cyrano*



de Bergerac's purported homosexuality or of Eugène Rostand's illegitimate birth. Additionally, he incorrectly ties Constant Coquelin to the role of Flambeau in the premiere of *Chantecler*, when Coquelin never committed to the part in the first production. Nevertheless, Wilson does make a strong argument about the popularity of *Cyrano de Bergerac* with the Parisian audience at the *fin de siècle*. He writes:

Presented to an audience accustomed to the witty trivialities of Scribe, to the realism of Dumas fils, to the social comedies of Augier, and to the morbid subtleties of Ibsen, the romance and essential nobility of *Cyrano de Bergerac* roused the public to an unwonted enthusiasm. (Wilson xiv)

Wilson continues his argument by examining the work against the national temperament at the time, one which continued to carry the shame of military defeat from the Prussians over twenty years earlier. Rostand's work awakened a sense of pride and nostalgia for their history that had lain dormant since the Franco-Prussian War.

In 1954, Mildred Butler wrote an article entitled "The Historical Cyrano de Bergerac as a Basis for Rostand's Play" which was published in the *Educational Theatre Journal*. Butler's article compares the Cyrano of history with the Cyrano of Rostand's play. She touches upon Cyrano's notoriety as a second in numerous fencing duels as well as the gross exaggeration of his nose, agreeing as others do that the nose featured in a contemporaneous portrait was "scarcely of proportions to justify Gautier's highly dramatized description" (Butler 234). Butler does acknowledge, however, that the historic Cyrano possessed certain insecurities related to his nose. A segment of his science fiction work *Les États et Empires de la Lune* describes utopian colonies on the moon, where men with the largest noses possess the noblest natures and receive the highest honors. Butler also recounts his participation in the Siege of Arras, his professional and academic liaisons, his open disgust for the actor Montfleury, as well as

the infamous events at the Porte de Nesle, noting chronologically that the fight came after the Siege of Arras. Butler's article, while informative, is dated and the information represented therein is subject to scrutiny as new information has come to light through the years. She waters down the nature of Cyrano's libertine lifestyle, while her timetable of events surrounding his death is at odds with other reports. Butler concludes by conjecturing on Rostand's attraction to the events surrounding the historic Cyrano and how Rostand transferred his research to the page, without providing any proof for her speculation.

Another annotated edition of the play was published in 1968, this time with a critical introduction by Edward Bird. Bird touches on the talent involved with the original production of the play, delivers a short biography of the playwright, and examines Rostand's other major plays. Bird repeatedly highlights Rostand's fascination with the ideal while making literary comparisons between Rostand and playwrights such as Shakespeare and Aristophanes. Bird dedicates a significant portion of his introduction to the history behind *Cyrano de Bergerac*. He provides a brief biography of the swordsman-poet, emphasizing his published works including his two plays *Le Pédant joué* and *La Mort d'Agrippine*, his letter satirizing Montfleury (*Contre le gras Montfleury, mauvais auteur et comédien*), and his science fiction novels *L'Autre Monde ou les États et Empires de la Lune* and *Les États et Empires de Soleil*. Bird also provides a brief biographical note on every major character in Rostand's play based upon a historical person; these include Madeleine Robineau, Christophe de Neuville, Henri Le Bret, Antoine de Guiche, Cyprien Ragueneau, and François Payot de Lignière among

others. Bird closes his introduction with a summarization of criticism leveled at the play after its premiere, a plot synopsis, and an examination of the play's widespread appeal.

As the centenary mark of the original premiere drew close, revivals and critical works became more prevalent. Geoff Woollen writes an excellent critical introduction to another annotated publication in 1994. He gives specific focus to Rostand's premiere following the Franco-Prussian defeat as well as in relationship to Rostand's theatrical contemporaries, such as André Antoine and Aurélien Lugné-Poe. He covers the standard biographical material, including Rostand's other works and sources. Woollen also draws a portrait of the historical Cyrano de Bergerac, his education and literary achievements being the primary foci. Woollen does touch upon Cyrano's legendary nose but only briefly before he attempts to classify Rostand's play. Woollen's argument regarding the genre of Rostand's play is an interesting one. He invents a type, which he calls *le panaché*, following Rostand's own devotion to the concept. According to Woollen, *panaché* is a pastiche, a mixture, of constituent generic features, be they neo-Romantic, neo-Classical, baroque or burlesque (xvii). He then goes on to prove how each style is evident within Rostand's writing, comparing the work to Corneille, Racine, Hugo, Agrippa d'Aubigné (a baroque writer), and Scarron the burlesque writer of *Jodelet duelliste* in 1646. Woollen closes his argument on *panaché* by referencing a 1905 essay by G.K. Chesterton found in his book *Varied Types*, which analyzed the elements of Rostand's self-titled genre: *comédie héroïque*.

The next section of Woollen's analysis focuses on Rostand's verse and the playwright's use and abuse of the alexandrine. He also touches upon the rhythm of Rostand's clipped dialogue (most evident in the original French) as well as the numerous

English translations that have attempted to capture the spirit and poetry of the original. Before closing with an altogether too brief examination of *Cyrano de Bergerac* on the stage and on film, Woollen attempts to explain the concept of *panache*. He examines the linguistic history of the word, its foreign derivations, and other idiomatic evolutions. Woollen also traces Rostand's use of *panache* outside of the play, primarily when he was asked to address the students at his alma mater, the *Collège Stanislas*, and when he defined it as a part of his acceptance speech for the *Académie française*. For Woollen, it is the "heroism of delicacy and self-restraint," where language rises above every situation and where the word is always mightier than the sword (xxxix).

In 1995, Edward Freeman published a collection of critical essays focused on Edmond Rostand and *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Freeman's work is not associated with the publication of the script, but rather an independent examination of Rostand's time and work, the historical Cyrano, and the resulting myth-like popularity surrounding the hero. Freeman begins his criticism with an academic look at the *belle époque* and the popularity of bourgeois theatre, an escapist experience from those still suffering from the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War. Popular theatre during this time was largely mimetic of the well-made play, popularized by Eugène Scribe. However, the work of the realists and naturalists was beginning to gain a following, along with the symbolists. Rostand's work would premiere in the middle of this eclectic mix of theatre. To better understand Rostand's preferences, Freeman then examines the playwright in a short biographical section that focuses on his literary influences, personal work, as well as his "quest of the Ideal" (Freeman 16). Freeman interrupts this biographical narrative with an

examination of Gautier's *Les Grottesques* and its association to the historical Cyrano de Bergerac, often trying to sort out fact from aggrandized fiction.

The second chapter of Freeman's work focuses on the mythical proportions of all things Cyrano: the history behind the man, the epic nature of the play's plot and language, and the resulting legend and personality associated with the character. Freeman organizes the chapter around four central topics: love, arms, poetry, and the infamous nose. In the section on love, the historical Cyrano's purported homosexuality is contrasted against Rostand's creation— or, rather, transformation, as implied by Freeman— of an ideal, selfless, heterosexual romantic while comparing him to other literary lovers such as Hugo's Ruy Blas. Here, Freeman highlights the importance of both Roxane and Christian in Rostand's play, characters largely overlooked in other critical works. The noble nature of the sublimated love in *Cyrano de Bergerac* proved to be popular with audiences who were being inundated with the frank, overtly sexual content in many of Paris's other theatrical offerings. Freeman then segues into the heroic nature of the soldier-poet, as manifest in Cyrano's military activities. He is quick to point out that "Cyrano's prowess as a soldier and swordsman, which is so central a part of the heroic national myth of 1897, is based on four details culled from Le Bret (28). Those four are his service at the siege of Mouzon, his participation in the siege of Arras, his notoriety among the cadets as a duelist, and the incident at the Porte de Nesle. Freeman looks to find the source for Rostand's martial details in France's military history, particularly as it relates to the Thirty Years War and the diplomacy of Richelieu contrasted with the wave of national embarrassment that held sway over Rostand's generation. Freeman concludes that "if the play is an apologia for war, it is for war to be

fought honorably and in a spirit of idealism before moving on to examine the language in the play (34). In his section on poetry, Freeman again reviews sources that contributed to Rostand's knowledge of the seventeenth century. Literary references, within the script, are also examined. These include Baro's *La Clorise* as well as Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. He also comments on Cyrano's fellow-poets Lignière and Ragueneau, historical contemporaries of the satirist. As he discusses the verse format in regards to the structure of the play, Freeman appears to agree with Woollen's conclusion: Rostand's work is a pastiche of styles. Finally, Freeman concludes this chapter with respectable examination of the myth of the nose, whether its exaggerated qualities come from Cyrano's historic rivals, Ménage and Dassoucy, or his own fixation with the appendage as detailed in *Les États et Empires de la Lune*. Here Freeman disagrees with critics who believe the nose to be phallic, pointing to the virtuous, noble, and decidedly unconsummated love that predominates the play.

Freeman's last chapter focuses on the play's production history, pointing out the rarity of a deconstructed performance as "there has been little variation in directorial style and interpretation" over the years (48). Freeman then discusses the ages of various Cyranos and the acting style demanded by the text and epic scope of the story. His focus, however, seems to be on the inherent meta-theatricality that Rostand's story demands, an interesting concept heretofore unexplored. The play does begin in a theatre, the audience sees a play within a play, and Cyrano makes a grand entrance, a "meneur de jeu", directing a series of spectacles. He is conscious of this role and proud of it (50). Freeman's argument is a strong one, drawing evidence from Cyrano's continuous role-playing, whether it is retelling the story of the Porte de Nesle at Ragueneau's pastry shop or

delivering lines as a stage prompter to Christian during the balcony scene. Cyrano is the cadet's entertainment, boosting their morale at the Siege of Arras, while directing his own death, on his terms, in the fifth act. In his next section, Freeman concentrates on Rostand's use of language as it applies to rhyme, literary and historical references within the play, and action through the power of word play. Freeman also infers that, like his creation, Rostand has been called an idealist. . . . He focuses on characters who, one way or the other, are motivated by a strong sense of the absolute, who seek after eternal moral essences (60). To conclude, Freeman revisits Rostand and examines his quest for perfection and fear of failure while simultaneously serving as an example of French pride and glory during a time of national insecurity and disillusionment. The result, in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, is worthy escapist entertainment that continues to capture people of all classes and nationalities today.

In 2003, Sue Lloyd published a detailed biography of Edmond Rostand entitled *The Man Who Was Cyrano: A Life of Edmond Rostand, Creator of Cyrano de Bergerac*. Lloyd's book is an extension of work done as a part of her Master's thesis at the University of East Anglia in 1977. The biography is commercial in nature, though she does touch upon important critical and academic scholarship in her narrative while providing detailed references and notes for each chapter. The biography is arranged chronologically, divided categorically by Rostand's life in connection with his literary achievements. Lloyd's work is thorough, carefully noting Rostand's personality quirks, scholarly accomplishments, and anecdotal stories that serve as base material for his large body of work. Most of her sources come from contemporary accounts of Rostand provided by his immediately family, close friends, business associates, or his own pen.

She begins by examining his childhood, ancestry, and education, along with the influence they would have on him in the years to come. Lloyd then continues by following the course of his professional accomplishments, from upstart dramatist to national celebrity.

Lloyd devotes most of her time to events that surround the creation, completion, performance, and publication of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Throughout the course of her book, she relates anecdotal tales that serve as personal sources to the play's plot, the care and research that went into its composition, the expense and rehearsal time behind its premiere as well as the critical response following the *répétition générale*, or premiere performance. Her examination continues with notable revivals of the play, various tours, translations, legal issues, and adaptations. In her focus on *Cyrano de Bergerac*, however, she never neglects the essays, poetry, and other plays in Rostand's body of work. She makes particular mention of Rostand's educational essays which won him early praise as well as his public speeches. Additionally, his poetry, from the early *Les Musardises* to his final *Le Vol de la Marseillaise*, is contextualized within the time period it was written. As she concludes her biographical narrative, Lloyd even goes so far as to summarize plays that were in the works or incomplete at the time of his death.

Critically speaking, the biography—though focused on Rostand's thematic devotion to the ideal—never delves into serious scholarship as Woollen or Freeman do. Lloyd rarely analyses Rostand's verse and never compares him to the celebrated poets and playwrights of old France. The organization of the biography breaks down towards the end and Lloyd's account becomes ambiguous, particularly when relating Rostand's infidelities. Ultimately, however, Lloyd's work is detailed and interesting to read. Hers is the only full-length biography on Rostand in English.



In 2008, English author Ishbel Addyman released a biography on the historical Cyrano de Bergerac entitled: *Cyrano: The Life and Legend of Cyrano de Bergerac*. Though the work primarily attempts to retrace the actions and events that shaped Cyrano in the seventeenth century, Addyman does spend some time on Rostand and the effect his play had on the legend. Addyman actually begins her work with a brief history surrounding Rostand's writing and production of the play. In this introduction, she discusses Rostand's fortunate associations with both Coquelin and Bernhardt; their partnership with Rostand ensured publicity and interest in the forthcoming play. In succeeding chapters, if Rostand is mentioned, it is to compare his fictional drama with historical fact. The one exception is Addyman's discussion surrounding the lawsuit against Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Unlike other authors, she believes that the American playwright Samuel Eberly Gross had a strong case against Rostand, as Gross had left a copy of the play at the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre, and Rostand's flippant and disinterested defense seemed full of contradictions.

Addyman's work is disorganized at best. Her writing seems to make illogical jumps, at times reading more like an imaginative train of thought than a researched biography. Though she attempts to piece together a complete history for Cyrano de Bergerac, it is quickly evident that there is little extant evidence on which to base any solid narrative. As a result, Addyman summarizes historical events and social expectations before speculating how Cyrano might have reacted in a similar situation. Nevertheless, Addyman does manage to communicate much of the information found in other critical works: his background, his education, his military service, his connections, and his works. The chapters are annotated with notes and Addyman includes a

comprehensive bibliography at its conclusion, but the body of her text never successfully communicates the truth behind the man.

### *Conclusion*

The lasting popularity of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and its subsequent translation into almost every language in the world emphasizes the story's universal appeal. Understanding Rostand's obsession with the ideal as well as the techniques he employed to structure and tell Cyrano's story are vital to any director who helms a production. In the following chapters, I will examine how a director's approach to *Cyrano de Bergerac* must take into consideration the themes and ideas that consumed Rostand's writing, discovered through careful play analysis and research. I will then discuss how I implemented those ideas in design and rehearsal.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Play Analysis

#### *Introduction*

The appeal of *Cyrano de Bergerac* lies in its dynamic title character and timeless story, but devotion to a play does not ensure success in production. A thorough analysis of the script is essential for directors, helping to bring to light details previously unseen as well as illuminating character motivations, poetic imagery, and climactic moments in the action. Analysis can provide inspiration and revitalize flagging creativity. Additionally, directors can proactively avoid poor artistic choices by delving into the details of the play. For our production, careful and thorough analysis helped ensure a style and theatricality that was faithful to Rostand's creation.

#### *Synopsis*

*Cyrano de Bergerac* takes place in seventeenth-century France and is divided into five acts, each set in a different location. The story begins in a Parisian theatre: the Hôtel de Bourgogne. As the audience trickles in to see a play called *La Clorise* performed by the fat actor Montfleury, the atmosphere is one of general ambient noise and commotion with a few standout characters. One such character is Lignière, an amateur poet who spends more time drinking than writing, accompanied by Baron Christian de Neuvillette, a recent recruit to the Cadets. New to town, Christian has asked Lignière to the theatre in the hopes that the poet can identify a mysterious beauty. While waiting for her appearance, Christian is introduced by Lignière to various nobles, who remark upon his

strikingly attractive but provincial appearance. Lignière soon grows tired of the pre-show atmosphere and tries to leave before being mollified by a cup of wine from the food seller just as Ragueneau enters the theatre.

Ragueneau makes his living as a pastry cook. His passion for poetry precedes him; he is known to give food on credit to any poet who graces his establishment. Ragueneau has come to see if Cyrano de Bergerac, the infamous poet-swordsman, will chase Montfleury from the stage. Cyrano has demanded that Montfleury retire from the stage for a month, a ban that the actor has not taken to heart. Le Bret, Cyrano's closest friend, joins the conversation, and the men proceed to enlighten Christian on the reputation of Cyrano de Bergerac. They elaborate on Cyrano's manner of dress (complete with white plumes), his Gascon pride, and, of course, his prominent nose. Their discussion is interrupted by the appearance of the woman who has captured Christian's heart. Lignière identifies her as Madeleine Robin, otherwise known as Roxane.

Upon entering, Roxane is immediately besieged by the Count de Guiche, a married man of considerable power. Lignière reveals that the count would have Roxane for himself were he not married to the niece of Cardinal Richelieu. De Guiche therefore intends to have her wedded to the Viscount de Valvert. Valvert is under De Guiche's control, so De Guiche could easily weasel his way into Roxane's bed. Christian naively focuses his rage on Valvert until Lignière points out that Roxane is looking at Christian before making his exit. As Valvert takes his seat, Christian reaches for a glove in his pocket, in order to incite a duel, only to find a pickpocket there. The pickpocket, in exchange for his freedom, reveals a plan against Lignière's life. Lignière has offended a

nobleman with his poetic rants. In retribution, this nobleman has hired one hundred men to attack him at the Porte de Nesle. Christian is faced with a decision: stay to meet Roxane or depart to warn Lignière. Showing himself a worthy friend, Christian leaves to find Lignière.

Soon after Christian's departure, the restless crowd of spectators demands that the play begin. Montfleury takes the stage without incident, much to Le Bret's relief and Ragueneau's disappointment. Ragueneau's disappointment is short-lived, however. No sooner does Montfleury begin his performance, than a booming voice is heard mocking him from the audience. It is Cyrano. Though the crowd comes to Montfleury's defense, Cyrano will not be pacified. He turns against the spectators inviting them to a duel if they dare. When no one volunteers, Cyrano simply makes his case against Montfleury before running him off the stage. To appease the angry audience and relieve the theatre manager from responsibility, Cyrano tosses his own money to the stage as a refund.

As the audience disperses, a concerned citizen confronts Cyrano about what he has done. He points to the fact that Montfleury has a powerful patron who could do Cyrano great harm. Cyrano simply points to his sword as his protection and dismisses the man. The citizen, however, becomes transfixed by Cyrano's nose. Caught in a trap, expertly laid by Cyrano, the citizen can do nothing but balk at the situation. Cyrano humiliates the man by praising his own nose, and the citizen flees disgraced.

The nobles condemn Cyrano's behavior and De Guiche encourages their defiance. Valvert, eager to earn De Guiche's praise, insults Cyrano. Cyrano, unfazed, unleashes a witty tirade against Valvert's trite attempt at an invective. This enrages Valvert who ends the verbal diatribe by challenging Cyrano to a duel. Without losing his composure,

Cyrano announces that he will now compose a poem, which, when completed, will be punctuated by Valvert's death. With expert skill in both wordplay and swordplay, Cyrano completes his impromptu piece and kills Valvert.

After praising Cyrano, the crowd disperses, and the theatre managers prepare for a rehearsal after dinner. Cyrano is offered food but declines because he has no more money, having just relinquished a month's salary to reimburse the theatre. Le Bret upbraids him, but the food seller takes pity on him and offers him refreshment. Cyrano declines all but the smallest morsels as Le Bret warns Cyrano that his words are only creating enemies. Le Bret specifically presses Cyrano for the truth behind this attack, and Cyrano admits that Montfleury looked lustfully upon the woman he loves: his cousin Roxane. When Le Bret encourages him to reveal this love, Cyrano refuses, indicating his repulsive nose.

The intimate conversation between Cyrano and Le Bret is interrupted when Roxane's Duenna comes with a message: Roxane wishes to meet with Cyrano early the next morning. This news is not only a balm to Cyrano's insecurities but a spark to fuel his wildest hopes and dreams. As Cyrano and Le Bret prepare to depart, Lignière enters, revealing the plot against his life. Cyrano eagerly seizes the opportunity to revenge a fellow poet. Invigorated by hope, Cyrano announces his intent to take on the hundred men who seek Lignière's death and marches out into the night.

The second act is set in Ragueneau's pastry shop. Ragueneau sits at a table attempting to compose verse before rousing himself to oversee the morning's work. As the cooks bring out the food, Ragueneau critiques their efforts, rewarding an apprentice who has created a pastry in the shape of a lyre. Ragueneau's wife, Lise, enters and

begins to wrap pastries. The baker is shocked to find that she has torn pages of poetry in order to create the paper wrappers.

At this point Cyrano comes into the scene, counting the minutes until his meeting with Roxane. Ragueneau praises the composition duel the night before. Lise notices that Cyrano's hand is wounded and inquires after the injury. He dismisses her concern, asking Ragueneau to clear the room upon his signal so he may entertain Roxane alone. He then takes a seat at Ragueneau's desk and starts to write his first love letter to Roxane. Various interruptions follow: Lise's lover, the Musketeer, enters first followed by the fraternity of poets who have come for their morning breakfast. The poets animatedly discuss the corpses they passed at the Porte de Nesle. They ponder who could have successfully fought against so many men. Cyrano never admits his participation. Ragueneau changes the subject to poetry by reading his humble composition while the poets stuff themselves. After praising Ragueneau for his generous heart, Cyrano takes Lise aside to confront her infidelity.

Cyrano catches a glimpse of Roxane's approach and at his signal, Ragueneau ushers the poets away. As Roxane is accompanied by her Duenna, Cyrano must first persuade the chaperone to leave them alone. He does so by giving her fresh pastries to eat outside. Roxane thanks Cyrano for killing Valvert the night before, as she feared the match designed by De Guiche. While reminiscing of their childhood together, Roxane discovers Cyrano's current injury. She inquires as to how he got the wound, and he admits that he was fighting a hundred men who threatened Lignière. Roxane demands to know the whole story, but he insists that she share her story first.

Roxane confides that she is in love. In telling her story of infatuation, it seems that she is describing Cyrano as the object of her affection. She tells of a soldier in his regiment who loves her from afar, too scared to speak. Cyrano hangs on her every word, but when she mentions that the man is beautiful, Cyrano pales. Roxane identifies her love as Christian de Neuvillette. Cyrano warns her against love at first sight, emphasizing that she does not yet know the man behind the handsome looks. Roxane redirects the conversation, revealing her reason for speaking to Cyrano. As Christian is a new recruit with the Guards, she fears for his safety, especially as the Guards are exclusively Gascon and Christian is Norman. Roxane asks, for friendship's sake, that Cyrano protect Christian, and Cyrano reluctantly complies. As she leaves, she asks Cyrano to tell Christian to write.

Cyrano is left alone until the captain of the Guards, Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, enters followed closely by the rest of the regiment. All seek information about the scuffle that took place the night before. Le Bret, who has entered with the cadets, unsuccessfully presses for information about the meeting with Roxane before being interrupted by De Guiche's entrance. The Count praises Cyrano for his victory at the Porte de Nesle as well as his display at the theatre the night before. The famous Cadets of Gascony are formally introduced to De Guiche before he asks Cyrano to write for him. Cyrano quickly refuses. The tense moment is broken by a cadet who runs in with the victims' hats, from the Porte de Nesle, spitted upon his sword. De Guiche admits that he employed the band of ruffians in order to quell Lignière's insolent writings. He warns Cyrano against excessive pride before making his exit.



After De Guiche has left, Le Bret takes the opportunity to counsel his friend against such proud displays and dangerous confrontations, as Cyrano is only making more enemies. Cyrano insists he was acting on principle, and therefore his excess is permissible. While Cyrano and Le Bret converse, Christian de Neuvillette arrives at the bakery to join the regiment. Another cadet takes Christian aside and cautions him against mentioning Cyrano's nose, effectively planting a seed of mischief in Christian's mind. Christian waits for Cyrano to begin the story of the Porte de Nesle before he cleverly interjects the word "nose" into any and every pause. Cyrano rages until he discovers the identity of this impetuous youth: it is Roxane's love. Again and again, Christian interrupts with some allusion to his nose. Eventually it is too much to take and Cyrano kicks everyone out except for Christian. Alone with Cyrano, Christian waits for a fight. Instead, Cyrano identifies himself as the cousin of Roxane and praises Christian's bravery. Christian begs his forgiveness, and the two strike up an amiable conversation where Christian confesses his inability to communicate with women. Christian asks for help. Cyrano secretly recognizes an opportunity to express his true love using Christian as a front. Cyrano pulls out the letter he had originally composed for Roxane and gives it to Christian for his own use, claiming it was just an exercise in poetic license. Christian hugs him in tremendous gratitude as the cadets and the Musketeer reenter. Believing Cyrano to be a changed man, the Musketeer foolishly insults his nose. Cyrano strikes the Musketeer, much to the delight of the cadets.

Act three takes place at night a few weeks later in front of Roxane's home, her balcony framed above the entrance. Outside the Duenna waits impatiently for Roxane to come down as they have planned to attend a lecture in the neighborhood that night.

Cyrano enters, accompanied by two amateur musicians he won in a wager. Annoyed by their lack of talent, Cyrano sends them off to the home of Montfleury. Roxane appears, and Cyrano inquires after Christian. Roxane sings Christian's praises. She is especially fond of the letters and recites samples for Cyrano's benefit. Cyrano, having written the letters himself, reacts as one critiquing his own work.

The Duenna catches sight of De Guiche approaching the house. She warns Roxane, and Cyrano steps inside the house to hide. De Guiche arrives and announces that he has been called up for the war and his entire company, which includes Cyrano and Christian, will be sent to the town of Arras. Roxane speaks of losing Christian in poetic terms, and De Guiche mistakenly believes she mourns his own departure. Roxane expertly manipulates the conversation to determine what the exact plans are. She insists, as an enemy of her cousin Cyrano, that the Guards be pulled from the war as it will hurt their honor. De Guiche takes this a sign of love, which she neither confirms nor denies. He pulls the order for the Guards and determines to hide himself away in a monastery nearby. After the regiment leaves, De Guiche will then return to Roxane in the night to make love to her. Roxane insists that he follow his orders for honor and duty. De Guiche leaves, promising to return.

In spite of the news, Roxane and the Duenna decide to keep up appearances and attend their lecture. Roxane recalls Cyrano from the house and asks him to tell Christian to wait for her. Cyrano asks Roxane to reveal what she will have Christian speak on tonight. She confides that she would have Christian speak freely of love. After Roxane departs, Cyrano calls to Christian who has been hiding nearby, proposing that they go to

Christian's house to study the night's dialogue. In a surprising turn of events, Christian refuses. He is tired of reciting lines and wants, for a change, to speak from his own heart.

Roxane and her Duenna return early, and Cyrano departs. Christian loses his nerve and calls after his friend, but Cyrano exits undeterred. The Duenna leaves Roxane alone with Christian, and they sit upon the bench near the house. After a lengthy silence, Christian attempts to express his adoration of Roxane, but fails to rise above simple and repetitive confessions of love. Roxane encourages him to wax poetical, but Christian can only revisit the same phrase over and over. This angers Roxane who retreats into her house, disappointed. An amused Cyrano returns, and Christian begs his help. Cyrano stands Christian before the balcony, hiding himself underneath in the dark.

Before they can put their plan into action, the two musicians return from Montfleury's home. Cyrano posts them on opposing street corners as lookouts, instructing them to play music when someone approaches. The music is to be sad for a man and sweet for a lady. Christian calls up to Roxane who appears at her balcony. Cyrano feeds him the lines, and Christian speaks the poetic words in fits and starts. When Roxane questions Christian's rhythm in delivering his verse, Cyrano takes immediate action. He pulls Christian under the balcony, impersonates Christian's voice, and explains away the hesitations hidden in the darkness below. Embolden by this opportunity, Cyrano pours out his heart, his love, and his devotion. Roxane is moved to tears. As Cyrano prepares to conclude, Christian requests a kiss. Cyrano desperately tries to recover the situation to his favor, but Roxane has heard the request and, believing it has all come from Christian, is willing to grant the kiss. As Cyrano and Christian

quietly argue underneath the balcony, the musicians alert them to a priest approaching. Though he is looking for Roxane, Cyrano sends him to another house.

As soon as the priest is gone, Christian again demands that Cyrano accept the kiss that Roxane offered so that he might climb up and take the prize himself. Cyrano delays the inevitable moment as long as he can until Roxane ends his poetical tactics by firmly bidding Christian to climb. Cyrano resigns himself to the situation and sends Christian up to the balcony. As Christian takes Roxane in his arms, Cyrano comforts himself with the knowledge that it was his words, not Christian's looks, which won the kiss.

Suddenly, the musicians alert Cyrano that the priest is returning. Cyrano moves quickly to prevent discovery and disaster. He calls out, breaking up the lovers, and asks for Christian. He informs them that the priest is returning with something for Roxane. The priest presents Roxane a letter from De Guiche, the contents of which he has not read. In the letter, De Guiche explains that he has not gone with the army, but waits at the monastery until later when he will slip out to see her. In her own brilliant way, Roxane reads the letter aloud while changing the content entirely; it is an order from Cardinal Richelieu that she should be married at once by this priest. Roxane pretends to break down at the news, so the priest naturally assumes that Cyrano is to be the groom. Christian intervenes and claims Roxane as his own. As the priest goes inside to perform the ceremony, Roxane implores Cyrano to delay De Guiche, who will shortly appear. Roxane and Christian leave to take their vows, and Cyrano is left to devise a plan to stall De Guiche; there is no time to mourn the situation.

Cyrano's plan consists of pretending he has fallen from the sky and landed in Paris. Cyrano disguises himself before leaping out in front of De Guiche. After

introducing himself as the man who fell from the moon, Cyrano explains in six steps just how he can accomplish space travel. When he feels that enough time has passed to allow for the ceremony's completion, Cyrano unveils himself to De Guiche and announces the wedding. In revenge, De Guiche immediately calls the Guards up for war; their regiment will leave tonight. The newlyweds are torn apart as Christian leaves to join the cadets. Roxane calls after them, asking Cyrano to take care of Christian and to make him write every day.

The fourth act opens on the battlefield near Arras. It is early morning and the cadets are mostly asleep. There has been no food for weeks, and the young soldiers suffer terribly from hunger. Carbon and Le Bret keep watch over their pitiful regiment and bemoan their plight. Christian, asleep with the rest, looks horrible. There is a crack of gunfire, and Cyrano returns from posting another letter to Roxane across enemy lines. Le Bret upbraids him, as usual, for his carelessness. Cyrano simply exits to write another. Drums sound and awake the sleeping Guards. As they rise, each complains of their insatiable hunger. Cyrano, prompted by Carbon, reappears and encourages them to think on other things. He calls the piper to play a song so that the soldiers will think of something besides their stomachs. As Bertrand plays, Cyrano quiets them with stories from Gascony, their homeland.

Their reveries are interrupted by De Guiche's approach. Cyrano rallies the troops, asking them to appear as if nothing bothers them. They break out their cards, dice, pipes, and books. De Guiche knows that this display is for his benefit. Though he is from Gascony as well, De Guiche is treated with disdain because he is a rich nobleman. He brags about his war effort, having charged the enemy three times yesterday. Cyrano

criticizes this action because De Guiche returned without his white scarf, a mark of his nobility and rank. De Guiche insists that no one could retrieve it from where he left it on the battlefield, effectively ending the argument until Cyrano produces the scarf from his pocket. De Guiche, without emotion, calmly takes the scarf and announces battle plans. The regiment is to be sacrificed for the good of the French army. De Guiche has arranged with the Spanish, through a double agent, the precise location of the attack. According to De Guiche, the Guards are the most defiant fighters and the army's best hope; Cyrano believes that vengeance motivated De Guiche's decision.

Knowing they are about to face their deaths, Cyrano and Christian confer quietly. Christian wishes to write one last letter to Roxane. Cyrano admits that he has already written it, handing over the letter to Christian to read. Christian immediately notices the tears that stain the page. Slowly, Christian begins to suspect that Cyrano loves Roxane as well. His concern is interrupted by the approach of a carriage, which has somehow made its way through enemy lines to their camp. The door opens to reveal Roxane.

Roxane's miraculous journey is retold with naïve joy as her success is largely based upon luck and love. While her appearance at the camp revitalizes the cadets, both Cyrano and Christian are immediately concerned by her presence and demand that she leave before the battle. Roxane will not be persuaded, though, and insists on staying by her husband's side. De Guiche goes to inspect the cannon, angered at Roxane's obstinacy. Her handkerchief becomes the regiment's standard, but the true *coup de grace* is that Roxane has brought Ragueneau and a carriage full of provisions with her. Food is passed throughout the encampment and soldiers happily eat their fill. Roxane plays the hostess, but Christian refuses food as he is far too concerned for her welfare. As De

Guiche returns, the soldiers hide their food. De Guiche asks Roxane to leave, but she refuses. As a result, De Guiche asks for a musket, fixed upon staying and fighting with the cadets for her protection. Impressed, the soldiers offer him food, which he declines in true Gascon fashion; Cyrano dubs him a new recruit and the regiment cheers. De Guiche leaves again, this time to inspect their defenses, escorting Roxane with him.

With Roxane temporarily distracted, Cyrano seizes the opportunity to talk to Christian. He reveals that he has written Roxane at least twice a day. The truth finally dawns on Christian; he is now convinced Cyrano loves Roxane. When Roxane returns from the inspection, Christian immediately takes her aside and asks her why she came. She replies with words that unknowingly destroy him. Roxane came to him because of his letters. She now loves Christian for his soul; it does not matter if he is ugly, maimed, or disfigured. Stunned by her words, Christian asks to be left alone. He sends her to hearten the troops, while he seeks out Cyrano and relates the details of his conversation with Roxane. He implores Cyrano to confess the truth so that she may choose between them. Christian will be loved for who he is or not at all. He calls Roxane over to Cyrano and leaves the two of them alone. Unnoticed, Christian departs to join the regiment as the battle begins. Cyrano cautiously questions Roxane. Could she really love Christian if her were ugly? She affirms this without hesitation. Emboldened and encouraged, Cyrano is on the verge of confessing the truth when Le Bret returns with horrible news: Christian has been hit by the first shots.

The soldiers carry the wounded Christian into camp. Roxane, hysterical, runs to his side where Cyrano joins her. He comforts the dying Christian, insisting that Roxane still loves him. Christian dies, and Roxane takes the letter from his lifeless body. Cyrano

instructs De Guiche to protect Roxane, as he is about to lead a charge. He raises the staff that holds Roxane's handkerchief and hurtles himself into the battle.

The final act of the play takes place fifteen years later. Roxane now resides in a convent, a perpetual virgin mourning her dead husband. Every Saturday, Cyrano pays his cousin a visit to update her on the events that happen around Paris. When the act opens, the nuns are awaiting Cyrano's arrival, discussing in animated tones his teasing ways. They reveal that Cyrano is now very poor but continues to maintain appearances because of his stubborn Gascon pride. The nuns retire as Roxane enters, entertaining De Guiche whom she has not seen in a long time. Roxane reiterates her eternal devotion to Christian and tells of Cyrano's weekly visits before a greatly troubled Le Bret comes to call. Concerned for his dear friend, Le Bret worries about Cyrano's poverty, hunger, and loneliness. De Guiche, on the other hand, remains unmoved and unconcerned, for he views Cyrano as completely free and beholden to none. He even expresses his envy for Cyrano's condition and warns Le Bret that Cyrano still has many enemies.

As De Guiche mounts the stairs to leave, Ragueneau makes a frenzied appearance. Immune to his exaggerated concerns and complaints, Roxane asks Ragueneau to wait until she has seen De Guiche out. Ragueneau spins on Le Bret and desperately informs him that Cyrano has been gravely injured by a falling piece of firewood, dropped upon his head as he walked down the street. The situation is altogether suspicious, and Ragueneau has come for Le Bret's help. They rush off together to save Cyrano without telling Roxane anything.

Puzzled at their quick disappearance, Roxane settles in to wait for Cyrano's weekly visit. Cyrano arrives late, physically struggling to hide his injury. Roxane gently



scolds him, and Cyrano simply apologizes for being detained by a tiresome visitor. Roxane draws his attention to Sister Martha who waits to be teased. After confessing that he ate meat again on Friday, Cyrano asks her, quite seriously, to pray for him. The sister seems to understand the request, agrees, and takes her leave. Cyrano commences with his weekly gazette, a recounting of Parisian activities over the past few weeks. While running through his itemized list, Cyrano loses consciousness. Startled, Roxane rushes to his side and wakes him up. He plays it off as his old battle wound from Arras. This leads to conversation about Christian and the letter that she has faithfully kept over the years. Cyrano asks to read it, and Roxane hands the letter over. As the darkness falls, Roxane believes he reads the letter aloud when in truth he recites the letter by heart. She begins to recognize the voice from the balcony so many years ago, then questions how he can read in the darkness. Roxane finally knows. She confronts him with the truth of the letter and his love, though he protests with every accusation. She demands to know why he has kept his silence, but his answer is interrupted by the return of Le Bret and Ragueneau. Le Bret breaks the news of Cyrano's injury to Roxane, who immediately understands the reason for his late arrival and faintness. Cyrano simply continues his gazette:

On Saturday, the twenty-sixth, an hour before  
Dinner, Monsieur de Bergerac  
Was foully, ignobly  
Murdered. (Rostand, Burgess 169)

He reveals the bandages and mourns the dishonorable way in which he will die, for he had wished it to be in battle. Roxane tries to flee for help, but Cyrano begs her to stay by his side. In an instant, she says all Cyrano ever wished to hear: "You must live. / I love

youö (171). He rises in delirium and fights the unseen Death, before collapsing into the arms of his beloved Roxane.

### *Genre*

Edmond Rostand defined *Cyrano de Bergerac* as a heroic comedy. This definition proves to be a bit problematic primarily because of the play's ending, which is often perceived as tragic. The plot develops and ultimately hinges on many heart-rending, ill-fated moments. As a result, the play is traditionally considered a late Romantic tragedy. Certainly, there is a definable Romantic influence on Rostand's writing. Rostand's interest in the works of Alexandre Dumas *père* and Victor Hugo are well documented, and *Cyrano de Bergerac* does exhibit many of the characteristics associated with Romanticism.

Henry Remak, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Indiana University, identifies Western European Romanticism as possessing the following qualities:

- (1) Attitudes toward the past: . . . anti-neo-classicism, anti-unities of time and place, anti-eighteenth century;
- (2) General attitudes: imaginativeness, cult of strong emotions, restlessness, boundlessness, individualism, subjectivism, cult of originality, . . . nationalism;
- (3) Characteristics of the works: supremacy of lyrical modes and forms, re-awakening of national epic, historical drama and novel. . . .  
(qtd. in Daniels 4)

Although *Cyrano de Bergerac* was not written as a reaction against French Neo-Classicism (those reactions had transpired some sixty years earlier with the work of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas), the play is traditionally considered a reaction against the cynicism and elitism of modern theatre movements such as naturalism and

symbolism. Nevertheless, Rostand, in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, certainly dismisses the classical unities of time and place as well as other rules that dominated Neo-Classicism. For example, Rostand deliberately mixed tragic and comic elements to tell the story of a hero who exemplified the general Romantic attitudes of individualism and originality. Additionally, the work itself was written in alexandrine verse, historic in subject and setting, and responsible for a renewed sense of national pride— all characteristics of Western European Romanticism.

It is interesting to note, however, that other scholars have found the Romantic label too confining for Rostand's epic work. Efforts to classify *Cyrano de Bergerac* appeared shortly after the play's premiere and are distinctly varied in their conclusions. Though these works are almost one hundred years old, these scholastic examinations contemporary to the play itself are worthy of investigation. They reveal a marked attempt to determine the style in which Rostand writes. In 1911, G. K. Chesterton, in his book *Five Types*, attempted to Anglicize the heroic comedy by comparing it to Shakespeare. In referring to Rostand's work, he wrote that "great comedy, [like] the comedy of Shakespeare, not only can be, but must be, taken seriously" (46). Additionally, Chesterton observes that our impulse to laugh at Cyrano's exploits is tempered by genuine concern for the character: "Our sympathies are as much committed to the characters as if they were the predestined victims in a Greek tragedy" (47). Barrett Clark, a contemporary of Rostand, also attempted to analyze the playwright's style in 1915. The scholar's comments on the genre, "the charm of the style, that inimitable mixture of Victor Hugo, [Alfred de] Musset, and Rostand," seem to indicate that there was something indefinable about Rostand; he wrote in a class all by himself (Clark 113).

American drama critic Clayton Hamilton concurred, saying “[Rostand] had no predecessors. . . . Rostand had no colleagues, not even any imitators; and he has brought forth no successors. His work was unique; and when he died, it ceased, a perfect and completed thing” (Hamilton 24). In historic criticism, therefore, Rostand seems to stand alone and defy easy categorization.

More recently, Geoff Woollen, a professor of French at the University of Glasgow, posits that the plays genre is “a *panaché*, i.e. mixture, of constituent generic features, be they neo-Romantic, neo-Classical, baroque or burlesque” (Woollen xvii). Woollen warns that the influences of other genres cannot be ignored. Rostand’s use of alexandrine verse and the creation of such a dutiful hero support legitimate comparisons to Corneille’s *Le Cid*. He also briefly touches upon baroque and burlesque attributes, particularly the “verbal extravagance” associated with seventeenth-century dramas and the rich humor and exaggerated grotesque characteristics associated with parody (xix). Woollen’s examination of the burlesque qualities found in *Cyrano* closely parallel Victor Hugo’s treatise on the grotesque and the sublime, found in his “Preface to *Cromwell*” published in 1827. As a result, I would like to make the case that, while all these labels—Neo-Romantic, Neo-Classical, Shakespearean—are arguably correct, Rostand has actually written a play whose genre is best defined by Victor Hugo’s idea of the *drame*.

As mentioned, Victor Hugo, one of the primary practitioners of French Romantic drama, was a favorite of Rostand. In the “Preface to *Cromwell*,” Hugo has written what has been termed a “manifesto for French romantic drama in its battle against the . . . neoclassical rules” (Gerould 299). He argues for a literary form where comedy and

tragedy intermingle as in real life, and Rostand's play certainly fits that description.

Perhaps the most interesting point made in Hugo's essay is his examination and defense of the "grotesque" in art.

While the terms "grotesque" and "sublime" were nothing new in the world of art, Hugo was the first to point out the sublime nature of the grotesque. He writes, "when placed beside the sublime, as a means of contrast, the grotesque, in our opinion, is the richest source that we can open to art" (Hugo 161). For Hugo, emphasizing the grotesque was an important idea to be explored in modern thought and literature: "[the modern muse] will see that everything in creation is not humanly *beautiful*, that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, deformity beside gracefulness, the grotesque on the reverse side of the sublime, evil with good, light with shadow" (158). The literary union of these opposing elements results in a new form Hugo terms the *drame*.

Hugo defines *drame* as the assimilation of "the grotesque and the sublime, the fearful and the absurd, tragedy and comedy" in one cohesive work (163-64). Although Hugo was obviously defending his own play *Cromwell*, the argument is certainly applicable to *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Rostand even uses the terms "grotesque" and "sublime" in the climax of act four.

CYRANO. Did you mean what you said?  
Don't be afraid of saying it to me.  
Even if he were ugly? . . . Terribly ugly?  
ROXANE. Terribly.  
CYRANO. Twisted? Deformed? Grotesque?  
ROXANE. How could he be  
Anything but noble, sublime, great-souled?  
(Rostand, Burgess 146-47)

When Hugo persuades us that, in using this style of the *drame*, "[poetry] will begin to act as nature does, mixing, but not confounding in its creations shadow and light, the

grotesque and the sublime, . . . body and soul, beast and reason,ö we are immediately reminded of the characters, dialogue, and plot of Rostand's play (Hugo 158-59). *Cyrano de Bergerac* even draws comparisons to the fabled Beauty and the Beast fairy tale, a textbook example of the union of the grotesque and the sublime. In his grotesque creation of *Cyrano*, Rostand has constructed a story which illustrates a sublime ideal. To do so, Rostand had to incorporate both tragedy and comedy. The hero had to belong to a world comparable to our own, where comedy and tragedy intermingle with the mundane and the extraordinary.

All theories and arguments aside, we must not forget that Rostand labeled his play a heroic comedy. I believe that for Rostand, the term "heroic" embodied the qualities of tragedy: nobility, pride, love, honor, and sacrifice. The protagonist behaves nobly towards those he loves and respects. He keeps his word and ultimately forfeits his own happiness to honor the memory of his deceased friend. This sacrifice is in part borne out, however, by his fear of rejection. He carries himself with an uncompromising sense of pride: pride in his impoverished estate, pride in his independence, and pride in his unwavering devotion to his cousin. On the other hand, *Cyrano's* wit, his exaggerated appearance, and the variety of comical supporting characters and situations in the play all serve to emphasize the humor in the production. Comic elements intermingle with a tragic situation, as in real life. When examined in this way, the term "heroic comedy" becomes another descriptor symbolizing the various dichotomous relationships found within tragicomedy or, more specifically, the *drame*.

While it is my opinion that Victor Hugo's *drame* best defines the genre and style of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, there is one other categorization of the play that deserves

examination. There are many scholars who simply term *Cyrano de Bergerac* a boulevard drama. Boulevard dramas were created and presented in middle-class theatres, making plays more accessible to the public. The advent of these smaller theatres created opportunities for actors and audiences who had wearied of the traditional, classical fare of the Comédie-Française to expand their repertoires. One of the most important boulevard theatres was the Théâtre-Saint-Martin Theatre, which [reopened] in 1815 (Daniels 8-9). The Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre would go on to become the site of *Cyrano de Bergerac*'s premiere at the end of the nineteenth century, in part because it was managed by Constant Coquelin—the first Cyrano.

The plays at these bourgeois houses were not bound by established rules or the classical fare that dominated the state run theatre. Additionally, boulevard theatres were renowned for producing pantomime and melodrama, constructing elaborate sets and costumes, presenting passionate and realistic acting, as well as welcoming foreign acting troupes, such as the English who performed popular Shakespearean plays. Victor Hugo was a witness to these performances, and, as a result, the Preface to *Cromwell* was in part inspired by them (Daniels 16). Rostand was an avid theatergoer, and it is easy to postulate that Rostand was influenced by the performances presented by these boulevard theatres. The term "boulevard drama" points to a largeness of style, variety in content, and an audience who patronized entertainment that reinforced their personal values and beliefs.

As a director, both the *drame* and the boulevard drama affected my approach to the play. In regards to Hugo's term, I wanted a design concept that somehow married the sublime and the grotesque. The world the characters inhabit should support their noble

causes, chaste devotion, and loyal sacrifices while at the same time allowing for physical comedy, impetuous infatuation, and grievous pride. Additionally, in regard to casting, I wanted actors who possessed the talent to handle both the tragic and comedic aspects of the play. Through exploration in rehearsal, the grotesque and sublime moments inherent in the script would be emphasized for performance. In terms of the boulevard drama, I knew that, historically, these performances were easily understood and entertaining to their audience. Through the adaptation of a translation, the edits of the script, and the direction of the actors, I wanted to ensure that our production was clear and accessible to a student audience as well.

### *Given Circumstances*

#### *Environmental Facts*

When Rostand wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac*, there was no reason to keep the unities of time or place as they had long been dismissed in French drama. Rostand sets each act in a different location which would have provided audiences with visual interest and spectacle. Rostand is not historically accurate in his mingling of location, time period, and event though he is often close. Rather, the incidents and environment serve as a foundation for the story and help capture the interest of an educated audience. The character of Cyrano demands surroundings that support his epic personality; the distinctly French locations also highlight Cyrano's role as a national, albeit literary, hero.

Act one is set in the Hôtel de Bourgogne, a tennis-court turned theatre that was very popular in seventeenth-century Paris. Rostand begins the narrative in 1640. In choosing the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Rostand gives his characters a truly theatrical entrance.



Additionally, the actions of the characters at the very beginning of the play mirror those of the audience, making them more aware of their own experience. Introducing Cyrano in such a famous theatre also emphasizes the meta-theatricality of such a character; Cyrano is both a consummate showman and writer/prompter at many points throughout the play.

The theatre helps to forward the action of the story by creating a closed environment ideal for observation and exposition. The public nature of a theatre also heightens the tension when heated words are exchanged, whether they are between Cyrano and Valvert or a pickpocket and Christian. The duel in verse, fought by Cyrano and Valvert, is kept within the theatre as well. Crowds must avoid the fight for their own safety; their proximity to the fight increases the chance of injury and raises the stakes in the scene.

The second act takes place early the following morning in Ragueneau's bakery. Again, Rostand creates an environment filled with the spectacle of people coming and going. There are cooks, poets, and cadets traipsing in and out, conducting business as usual. It is a sensuously busy environment as well, with breads, sauces, birds, pastries, and cakes constantly moving from oven to consumer. Understandably, this cluttered room creates tension. Cyrano wants the place emptied to meet with Roxane; Ragueneau wants to entertain his breakfasting poets. Time forces the action because Cyrano must clear the area prior to Roxane's arrival, no easy task when the poets arrive for their morning meal. Nevertheless, ideal love can only be confessed in complete privacy, unfettered by eavesdroppers. Even after Cyrano's shocking disappointment in learning

that Roxane loves Christian, the bakery provides no solace or privacy for a broken heart to grieve. Cyrano is forced to pretend nothing is wrong.

There is no specific time or date given for the third act. It is assumed that several weeks have passed, for Roxane has many of Christian's letters memorized by heart and Christian has begun to weary of the deception. It is the evening of the cadet's departure for the Siege of Arras, which historically took place in the summer of 1640. This looming departure will ultimately drive the action of the scene, emboldening De Guiche, Roxane, Christian, and Cyrano to take romantic risks in pursuit of their own personal happiness. In setting the action under a moonlit balcony, Rostand has chosen a location and time that are perfect for romantic confessions and escapades.

Time propels the action of act three in several ways. As the army is due to march for Arras, De Guiche devises one last rendezvous with Roxane. His multiple appearances, orders, and letters always disrupt Cyrano's romantic orchestrations. When Roxane learns of De Guiche's ignoble intentions to visit her that night, she impulsively manipulates a hasty marriage to Christian. Cyrano must buy them the time they need to complete their vows by disguising himself on the spot as a mad space traveler. When De Guiche eventually discovers the impromptu wedding, he orders Christian and Cyrano to war. Their departure is immediate, and an unexpected reprieve for the suffering Cyrano. Nevertheless, Roxane's request that Christian write to her everyday sets up the conflict and climax of the fourth act.

Act four takes place on the battlefield during the Siege of Arras, specifically at the camp of the cadets of Carbon de Castel-Jaloux. Here, they have fortified themselves behind a battlement for protection against the Spanish. The scene opens at early dawn,

when Cyrano is able to slip out of camp to post a letter and return without much trouble. The location of a battlefield is undeniably epic and Rostand's chosen setting for the thematic climax of the play. No other location could support the honor of sacrifice, the illumination of truth, or the death of hope so beautifully. With the attack eminent, the stakes of the scene are raised with the arrival of Roxane. Though she brings provisions to the starving cadets, Roxane has placed herself directly in harm's way, and there is little time for Cyrano or Christian to save her. When the Spanish attack, the characters, in the face of death, confess startling truths and make noble sacrifices in service of love.

Fifteen years pass between the climax of the fourth act and the beginning of the fifth. It is now Saturday, September 26, 1655—a cool autumn evening that slowly turns to night. The location is the convent of the Holy Cross in Paris. By setting the final act in a convent, Rostand effectively absolves Cyrano from the atheism traditionally associated with his historical counterpart. Cyrano's gentle ribbing of the nuns as well as his sincere request for prayer serve to idealize the tragically independent character. Time propels the dialogue and decisions of the scene by reinforcing the brevity of life. With death imminent, Cyrano must see Roxane one more time and confesses, albeit in a roundabout way, his love for her. The result is the plot climax of the play: Roxane understands the truth and declares her love for Cyrano.

### *Economic Environment*

There is little about Cyrano's economics that actually drive the action of the play. It can be argued that the economic status of certain characters creates conflicts on the basis of class. De Guiche's finery and connections with power are looked down upon by his fellow Gascons. The cadets find poverty honorable, especially Cyrano who refuses to

grovel or flatter in an effort to improve his economic condition. Cyrano's pride keeps him from accepting gifts or handouts, with the one exception being the meager meal presented by the food seller in act one. As a result, Cyrano is continually poor. His extravagant generosity in act one, where he refunds the entire audience of *La Clorise*, only serves to underscore his remarkable generosity and belief in independence at any cost. Cyrano's condition is so deplorable by the fifth act that Ragueneau, Le Bret, and the nuns all marvel at his poverty. The cost of Cyrano's independence is measured by his loneliness, hunger, and meager living conditions—none of which have lessened Cyrano's indomitable spirit of *panache*.

### *Political Environment*

Rostand's representation of the seventeenth century incorporates references to royalty and governmental institutions such as the *Académie française*. Anyone associated with power, whether Cardinal Richelieu or the Count de Guiche, is generally depicted in an unflattering manner. The one exception is Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, the commander of the cadets. Carbon's loyalty to the men under his command is admirable; he even refuses a direct order from De Guiche for their benefit. Carbon de Castel-Jaloux has earned the respect of Cyrano as well; Cyrano never fails to comply with a direct order from his commander.

Aside from the politically drawn characters, events surrounding the Thirty Years' War and the Siege of Arras provide a way for Rostand to dramatize soldiers, battles, and barricades. Depicting the cadets, apart from being historically connected with the real Cyrano de Bergerac, enables Rostand to explore the proud nature of Gascon soldiers as well as develop the unlikely friendship between Cyrano and Christian. In fact, Christian

has come to Paris precisely so he can join the Guards. Rostand's ability to dramatize a time of martial victory in France ultimately led to a revival of patriotism among the French. As a loyal soldier and independent spirit, Cyrano represents the best of France: liberty, equality, and fraternity.

### *Social Environment*

Rostand dramatizes many social environments in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The Hôtel de Bourgogne is one excellent example. As mentioned, characters come to the theatre to see and be seen, especially in the case of the Marquises, the Viscount de Valvert, the Count de Guiche, Roxane, and other *précieuses*. Certainly, the daily gathering of the poets in Ragueneau's bakery illustrates the importance of a supportive artistic community, albeit in pursuit of a free breakfast. In the third act, Roxane and the Duenna exit to listen to a reading in the home of a neighbor. Literary readings were often popular social events, whether dramatically presented in a theatre or at the home of influential personages. There are also allusions to the usual social vices of gambling, gaming, and drinking.

The social environment does little to forward the action of the play, particularly because of Cyrano's steadfast independence. Cyrano prefers to live by himself and pursue solitary endeavors. Socially, however, Cyrano is no outcast. His personality, his charm, and his pride make him either very desirable as a friend or much feared as an enemy. He is a stranger to neither his cousin nor to the brotherhood of cadets. Throughout the play, Cyrano's true social endeavors are usually intimate interactions with his closest friends, which include Le Bret, Roxane, and eventually Christian.

### *Religious Environment*

The religious environment of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is difficult to analyze. The historic Cyrano is traditionally believed to be an atheist. Rostand presents his version of the fictional Cyrano with this in mind but without an obvious declaration of unbelief. Cyrano does invoke the name of God but primarily as an exclamation. Others, such as Christian and Roxane, speak of God more respectfully. As a result, Rostand's work seems ambiguous towards religion—particularly that of the Roman Catholic faith. Cardinal Richelieu's power, De Guiche's affiliation with the Cardinal, and the characterization of the bumbling friar seem to criticize or ridicule the abuse of power in the church. Rostand is much gentler, however, in his representation of the nuns. Mother Marguerite is a sensible woman who advises her young charges with great wisdom. Although Sister Claire is obviously vain, Sister Martha is presented as tender, prayerful, and compassionate. By setting the final act in the garden of a convent, however, Rostand has chosen the ideal environment for Cyrano's final confession and death. The convent garden is neither in the church nor on unsanctified ground. Rather, the courtyard provides a place where Cyrano may breathe the free air, gaze upon his beloved moon, and fight his last battle unaided; his sacrificial love of Roxane has redeemed the tortured soul of the swordsman-poet.

### *Previous Action and Point of Attack*

The information that Rostand provides about previous action is extremely important, particularly as it applies to Cyrano's life and how it shaped his character; it identifies him as the heroic Everyman. Cyrano's childhood escapades with Roxane lessened the pain of his mother's neglect as Roxane filled a maternal void with the

attention she lavished on her cousin. As an adult, Cyrano's outspoken nature has resulted in a growing number of enemies. One of these is Montfleury, who has been banished from the stage by Cyrano.

Previous action concerning this minor character provides the inciting incident for the first act. This is not to be confused with the inciting incident that propels the entire play; however, the moment deserves mentioning because it shapes Rostand's point of attack and helps define Cyrano as chivalrous and protective. Cyrano observed Montfleury staring at Roxane, caressing her with lustful eyes. Though Cyrano was no doubt critical of Montfleury's bombastic acting, Cyrano's anger was sparked by the leering gaze. Montfleury's return supplies the fuel for a confrontation demonstrating Cyrano's matchless showmanship and determination. This is Rostand's way into the story and provides Cyrano with the grand entrance he deserves. What makes this initial conflict between Cyrano and Montfleury interesting is its juxtaposition with the introduction of Christian. Rostand introduces Christian long before either Montfleury or Cyrano. However, this seemingly innocuous soldier will prove to be Cyrano's true rival and a major antagonist in the play even though the two men do not meet until the end of the second act.

The inciting incident that propels the entire play is difficult to define for *Cyrano de Bergerac*. There are many reasons for this. First, Rostand gives little information concerning the title character's life prior to the opening act. For those scholars who believe that the inciting incident happens before the first line of dialogue is spoken, then the inciting incident must be the chance encounter of Christian and Roxane sometime prior to act one. Their love-at-first-sight experience sets the plot in motion. Although

their paths have barely crossed, Christian will come to the theatre with the specific intent of learning her name. Likewise, Roxane will also pursue Christian, enlisting the help of her cousin Cyrano who, in an act of pure selflessness and heroism, will sacrifice everything to ensure her happiness. Though defensible, this choice is problematic because it excludes the title character from the inciting incident. However, I would argue that Cyrano's life and happiness are so closely tied to Roxane's that his interest and involvement would be inevitable. For scholars who believe that the inciting incident is the point of no return in the plot, then the best choice is Cyrano's decision to conceal his love, protect Christian, and ensure Roxane's happiness in act two. This choice is difficult to defend as well because it happens so late in the action of the play, nearly halfway through the second act. Nevertheless, every decision that Cyrano makes from this point centers on his promise to Roxane.

Rostand provides little other previous action. Exposition reveals that Cyrano is a member of the cadets under the command of Carbon de Castel-Jaloux. Among those cadets is Le Bret, Cyrano's best friend. Other characters, such as De Guiche, Ragueneau, and Lignière, also have back stories. De Guiche is married to Cardinal Richelieu's niece, though he carries the flame of love for Roxane. As a result, he is trying to orchestrate a marriage between Roxane and the Viscount de Valvert, who would most likely look the other way should De Guiche choose to seduce her. Ragueneau, who desires to be something of an artist himself, is notoriously abused by both his society of breakfasting poets and his unfaithful wife Lise who has taken up with a dashing Musketeer. Lignière, a drunken poet whose forte is songwriting, has written some unfavorable verses aimed at De Guiche prior to the show's commencement. As a result, De Guiche has arranged for a



hundred thieves and ruffians to waylay Lignière on his way home from the theatre at the Porte de Nesle. Cyrano's discovery of the plot will unfold as the climax of act one.

### *Dialogue, Repetition, and Imagery*

The original *Cyrano de Bergerac* was written in alexandrine verse. An alexandrine is a line of twelve syllables (six iambic feet), usually presented in rhyming couplets. As a poet, Rostand naturally preferred to write in verse, but the form apparently appealed to him because it was the most difficult form in which to succeed (Lloyd 46). Additionally, Rostand's rhyme and meter combined with the romanticized events of the story satisfied an audience nostalgic for France's glory days under Louis XIV. Such historic subject matter demands the use of heightened language, and Rostand's clever use of alexandrine verse cemented the popularity of such a noble romantic hero.

When translating the original material into English, there is great difficulty in recreating Rostand's verse. It either becomes pedantic and labored or it loses something in translation; it is difficult to match the spirit of Rostand's original. Upon closer examination of the dialogue, no matter the translation, one finds repetitions of words, phrases, and images that contribute significantly to the style and theme of the play. One of the most immediately recognizable repetitions is the talk of food. On one level, it appeals to the palette and the stomach, but on another level it points to the immediate Romantic sensuality of the play. There is something tangible and satisfying in the rich repetitions of words such as pastry, tart, fruit, delicious, appetite, turkey, pies, cakes, breakfast, pheasant, and cheese. The abundance of food visible in the second act is directly contrasted with the painful absence of it in the fourth act, as the men starve on the battlefield. When Roxane miraculously appears on the scene, she not only brings

nourishment for the soul but provisions for the men's stomachs as well. Though the play is not about food per se, it is about those things which nourish and sustain the human soul, whether that be love, honor, principle, or courage. Also, as a play influenced heavily by Romanticism, *Cyrano de Bergerac* should appeal to the senses on a very phenomenological level. It is a feast for the ears, the spirit, and, if staged properly, for the eyes. Within the dialogue, Rostand incorporates images of light and dark, sun and moon, love and hate, and hope and disappointment—dichotomous relationships that echo the sublime and the grotesque. These common oppositions, while both beautiful and terrible, are often overlooked. Rostand, through the story of Cyrano, wonderfully brings them into focus and consciousness.

There are also repetitions pertaining to duty, honor, sacrifice, and heroism as they relate to the military, to chivalry, and to friendship. The comforting images and talk of food are often contrasted against words such as sword, blade, musketeer, Guards, cadets, war, siege, duty, patrol, and artillery. These images help illustrate the fact that this is not a light play dealing with fleshly pleasures and careless hook-ups. Rather, these repetitions add weight, depth, and meaning to Cyrano's story. They raise the stakes and help underline the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual battles faced by all humanity, whether for love and honor or for country. Additionally, Rostand takes the allusions to another level by incorporating references to mythological gods, soldiers, or lovers. Cyrano is forever quoting or mentioning classical references such as Ulysses and Penelope, Helen and Paris, Anthony and Cleopatra, Orpheus, Apollo, Phoebus, Nemesis, Hercules, Achilles, Socrates, Plato, and Galileo. Though mostly used as literary or poetic

analogies, these heroic personalities serve to heighten the play and raise the character of Cyrano to legendary status.

*Cyrano de Bergerac* also, in some ways, celebrates the common man while warning him against the dangers of excess. Rarely does Rostand mention a noble, an academic, or some power within the Church without painting them in a disagreeable light. Repeated references to the aristocracy, the papacy, or other characters who aspire to such greatness are often paired with words such as swine, venom, hemorrhoid, fat, and tumor. Conversely, the common soldier, baker, poet, and bourgeoisie are celebrated as the true fighters, artists, gourmands, and lovers. True nobility lies where there is no pretension, hypocrisy, or falseness. It is better, rather, to celebrate the hardy, earthy simplicity of Gascon pride than to aspire to lace, fashion, and power.

### *Character Analysis*

#### *Cyrano de Bergerac*

The action of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is appropriately centered on the title character, the protagonist. The story focuses on Cyrano's efforts to love and be loved by Roxane. He is Rostand's embodiment of the ideal hero, one who also happens to struggle with his own insecurities. Through Cyrano, Rostand explores the human need for higher ideas, especially those of personal integrity, nobility of spirit, pure love, and personal sacrifice. Cyrano's journey is one of self discovery. He believes himself too ugly to be loved at the opening of the play, yet by the end, he gains not only Roxane's love but the understanding that it was his all along.

Cyrano's story also reflects a series of polar opposites that warrant examination. Physically, Cyrano starts out imposing, unbeatable, skillful, and dominating. His dominating presence is immediately identifiable by the way he enters the first act. His coordination, quick reactions, and timely responses emphasize the remarkable talent and sheer energy that this character possesses. Conversely, by the end of the play, Cyrano is physically weak, given to stumbling and fainting as he visits Roxane for the last time. Cyrano's untimely end, though likely brought about by his enemies, was no doubt further precipitated by his dire living conditions. He is poor, hungry, and too proud to accept help in his need. Additionally, Cyrano has a reversal of his mental faculties. For most of the story, he is so quick-witted and sharp in his observations that Cyrano seems to be psychologically invincible. As the play progresses, however, we see that Cyrano is subject to the same insecurities, fears, and lapses in judgment that trouble all mankind. In his final moments, he trails off when speaking with Roxane and hallucinates one last duel between himself and Death. His physical and mental limitations have finally caught up with his indomitable spirit.

It is our interest in Cyrano's happiness that captures our attention as an audience and keeps us engaged through all five acts. Cyrano is a captivating individual; we identify and sympathize with his heroic sacrifices, sharp sense of humor, and crippling insecurities. His journey is filled with personal climaxes that alternately lift then dash his hopes.

Initially, based upon Roxane's reaction to the duel at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Cyrano is led to believe that she might love him. Roxane's circuitous confession of her infatuation further encourages Cyrano's hopes; every descriptor she uses could be applied

to Cyrano. When the truth of her interest is discovered, Cyrano bravely and artfully hides his crushing disappointment. He will settle to be her friend. After forming an alliance with the dull-witted Christian, Cyrano is presented with the opportunity, through cover of darkness, to confess his true feelings to Roxane. She believes it is Christian who speaks, and Cyrano watches as someone else gains the prized kiss. Cyrano's disappointment is compounded when he must delay De Guiche for the clandestine wedding. Ironically, the call to battle and subsequent separation from Roxane serves to ameliorate his grief; the wedding cannot be consummated right away.

The fourth act finds Cyrano writing feverishly to Roxane, always pretending it is Christian who writes. His act is a deception to himself, Roxane, and Christian. Roxane's unexpected arrival at the battlefield forces Cyrano to admit the truth to Christian. After Christian learns that Roxane loves him only for his "soul," he insists that Cyrano tell Roxane the truth. As Cyrano resolves to do so, encouraged by the hope of her love, Christian is shot and Cyrano is forever silenced. It will take another fifteen years and a mortal injury to finally cajole the confession of love from his lips. He has nothing left to lose. Roxane's admission of her love for him is bittersweet, as his happiness and realization of the ideal must end in his death.

As discussed earlier, Cyrano is Rostand's ideal romantic hero. He willingly lays aside his own selfish desires to promote those of his beloved. Every bit a "Renaissance man," Cyrano is smart, athletic, sensitive, and noble. He is easily characterized as swashbuckling. But Cyrano is not a "perfect" character. Though De Guiche or Valvert exemplify self-indulgent behavior, Cyrano is likewise an example of disproportionate excess, particularly as it relates to his pride and vocal opinions. His unyielding fidelity to

his word, his means, his independence, and his soul is his *hamartia*; Cyrano is pride personified. Cyrano highly regards his own wit, intelligence, verbal dexterity, and skill as a swordsman and poet. This is wonderfully contrasted against his painful insecurities in his appearance, his love for Roxane, and his fear of her rejection. His *panache* becomes the crutch upon which he falls as well as his saving grace.

### *Christian de Neuvillette*

Christian functions as the play's primary antagonist. He is Cyrano's polar opposite: handsome and stupid. Nonetheless, Christian has bravery, nobility, pride and spontaneity to match Cyrano. Christian is initially driven by the surface attributes of love: a beautiful woman and an inviting look. He wants the same thing as Cyrano to be loved by Roxane as he is which directly opposes Cyrano's primary desire. What makes their rivalry so unique is their friendship, discovered in the decision to unite and work together as the perfect lover. Christian is initially blind to Cyrano's affection and ignorant to his motives. He sees Cyrano only as a means to an end; somehow, Cyrano's talent as a writer will enable him to win Roxane's hand. There is a certain amount of moral ambiguity to Christian in this action. Not only is he willing, in his personal insecurity, to deceive Roxane but many times Christian gives the impression of an impetuous boy who wishes to skip the wooing and head straight for the sack.

What makes Christian an ultimately sympathetic character is the sacrifices he is willing to make on behalf of Roxane and Cyrano so that they may be happy together. His character arc follows a coming-of-age storyline. He goes from an impetuous, lustful youth garnering a kiss and a bride to a young man who values truth and acts honorably in the face of defeat. When Roxane surprises Christian by appearing on the

battlefield, she unknowingly forces a confrontation between Christian and Cyrano where the truth of their friendship-rivalry will be revealed. Not only is Christian sincerely concerned for Roxane's welfare with the threat of battle, but he also fears losing her to his true competition, Cyrano. Christian's heartfelt despair, when he hears that Roxane loves him only for his soul, reveals the depth of his emotion.

In an act of great nobility and sacrifice, Christian does implore Cyrano to tell Roxane the truth, insisting that their marriage can easily be annulled. This forces Cyrano to confront his fear of rejection and embrace the very real possibility of Roxane's love. For Christian, however, it is a much different story. This realization of the truth, the consequences of the deception, and the revelation of Cyrano's soulful victory thrust Christian to the brink of despair—a place where he impetuously and carelessly throws himself into the dangers of battle.

### *Roxane, Madeleine Robin*

Roxane, on the surface, seems to be the goal: she is the object of affection for both Cyrano and Christian. She is the ideal woman possessing an unparalleled beauty, a quick wit, and a keen intelligence. She even displays a maternal side in her care for Cyrano and the other cadets. However, upon closer examination, Roxane is revealed to be a highly complex character who has one of the most interesting arcs in the play. Initially, Roxane is nothing more than a spoiled young woman who cajoles, manipulates, and flirts to her own benefit. By the conclusion of the show, Roxane has matured into a reserved, quiet woman whose grief is truly evident. No more is she the childlike girl who turns her nose up at the grotesque, but rather a woman who has learned to look into the hearts of others and who, in the end, will deeply mourn her loss of Cyrano.

Roxane functions as one of the primary antagonists of the play. Initially, her hopes and dreams run contrary to Cyrano's own, and, as a result, Cyrano is forced to hide his true feelings and nature from her until the climax of the play. He will always put Roxane's happiness first. When Roxane admits her infatuation to Cyrano, asking for Christian's protection and a letter, she has unwittingly set in motion a chain of events which will ultimately prove tragic.

What Roxane desires is what she sees: the handsome Christian who appears to have taken an interest in her. But her love is a demanding one, for Christian must live up to her idyllic imagination and hopes of a brilliant and witty lover. Christian must be the ideal lover to satisfy her personal expectations. Roxane has revealed her own shortcomings and betrayed herself by refusing, initially, to see beyond the surface, by disregarding Cyrano's kind warnings, and by refusing to accept the evidence of Christian's stupidity.

Her personal journey continues with her growing love of Christian through his letters, the sealing of their relationship with a kiss and a hasty marriage, a sudden separation from war, a brief reunion, and Christian's unexpected death. Finally, Roxane must face the terrible realization that Cyrano is the one she has always loved — just as she loses him forever. Her panic and anguish are proof that Roxane has matured into the truly ideal woman: one who recognizes, appreciates, and reciprocates a love like Cyrano's.

### *Count de Guiche*

Count de Guiche is the villain of the piece. He also serves as an antagonist to Cyrano's desires, though the Count is rarely a match for Cyrano's skill, intellect, and



*panache*. De Guiche embodies all that Cyrano finds distasteful. De Guiche denies his heritage as a Gascon, seeking to bury his humble origins in the pomp and power of courtly associations. De Guiche, though married, loves Roxane to distraction. His title and court alliances make him a very powerful man, one which Roxane, Christian, and Cyrano must defy carefully. What makes De Guiche especially dangerous is his intelligence. He is quick, shrewd, calculating, and treacherous. De Guiche also has a personal pride to rival Cyrano's.

Interestingly enough, Rostand allows De Guiche to redeem himself. His actions in act four, at the Siege of Arras, are both noble and sacrificial. De Guiche would rather fight to the death than jeopardize Roxane's life and therefore earns Cyrano's respect. Cyrano ultimately trusts him to save Roxane from the peril of the battle. In the fifth act, De Guiche reflects respectfully on Cyrano, ultimately admiring his independence, pride, and talent. Though De Guiche will never gain the affections of Roxane, he has won from her a forgiving friendship and proven himself a noble Gascon in the end.

### *Le Bret*

Le Bret is Cyrano's best friend and most trusted confidant. He functions as a secondary character used to draw out Cyrano's quiet qualities. In *Le Bret*, Rostand has created the ideal friend. Le Bret is protective, even paternal, with Cyrano, though they are the same age. He constantly worries about Cyrano's health and safety, warning Cyrano that his tirades and escapades go too far and fretting that his friend will starve to death. He is a trusted confidant to whom Cyrano reveals his greatest longing and insecurity. Le Bret's nobility of character lies in the fact that he neither judges nor condemns Cyrano for his humanity. Rather, he seems to want nothing more than

Cyrano's happiness and encourages him in that pursuit. After witnessing Cyrano in a particularly foul mood, Le Bret easily draws the conclusion that Roxane does not love him. There is a simple, heartfelt, and sincere grief in Le Bret's understanding of the situation. He knows Cyrano well. Though Le Bret, the audience is able to witness Cyrano's anxiety, uncertainties, and self-deprecation that accompany the fear of rejection in love. Le Bret permits Cyrano to be human.

### *Ragueneau and Lignière*

Ragueneau and Lignière initially appear to be simple comic renderings in supporting roles. However, both present startling comparisons to Cyrano. They are poets, comrades in the world of pen and paper, verse, and noble ideas. They strive to create on a level comparable to that of Cyrano but will never measure up due to their personal limitations. As a result, I believe that both Ragueneau and Lignière represent lesser "Cyranos."

Ragueneau is naïve, trusting, and willing to look the other way when abused— all attributes that, ironically, endear him to Cyrano. This is not to say that Ragueneau is completely ungifted. Ragueneau is a masterful cook where Cyrano is a brilliant swordsman. Ragueneau's humility, sincere passion, and tender emotion make him weak, though. Ragueneau is usually characterized as a bit melodramatic, emotional, and prone to ridicule. Ragueneau's personal dramas create not only comic moments in the play, but also provide Cyrano an opportunity to be protective, paternal, and patient. Cyrano is never disloyal to a true friend.

Lignière, though only dramatized in the first act, serves a two-fold purpose. First, he functions as the channel that delivers a majority of the exposition. Through him, the

audience learns about major characters and conflicts. He is also an indicator of the loyalty that exists between Cyrano and his fellow satirists. Lignière, though a hopeless drunk, has apparently displayed occasional worthy qualities. Cyrano takes offenses done to Lignière personally and chooses to defend the hopeless sot. It is a clever way to introduce Cyrano's loyalty, his bravado, and his fearlessness as well as a skillful conclusion to the first act, ensuring the audience will return after a brief intermission.

#### *Viscount de Valvert and Lise*

Characters such as the Viscount de Valvert and Lise serve to reveal Cyrano's character. He has little patience for fops such as Valvert, who flatter and manipulate their way into positions of power. Cyrano's disdain is even greater when Valvert opens his mouth and proves to be simple and stupid. Valvert is not entitled to the vanity he possesses, and Cyrano's exemplary wit and swordsmanship are best exercised in humbling such a foolish individual.

Cyrano's devotion and loyalty to his friend Ragueneau requires that he chastise Lise for her obvious infidelities. Lise's behavior, her anger at being discovered, and her subsequent dialogue prove that Cyrano is an excellent judge of character. Cyrano holds his friends to the same high principles he practices. There is a standard of conduct from which Cyrano will not swerve; he cannot abide adultery or betrayal.

#### *The Food Seller and Sister Martha*

Cyrano's interaction with the food seller and Sister Martha provide Rostand with opportunities to show Cyrano's chivalrous side. Cyrano is able to put aside his pride and accept a charitable act from the food seller. Her obvious admiration and embarrassment

around Cyrano speaks to a genuine infatuation with the poet swordsman. Although she does not represent the ideal woman, Cyrano is able to look beyond her station and elevate her to the status of a lady by kissing her hand. In the fifth act, his interactions with Sister Martha are similarly chivalrous. Cyrano certainly respects her station and vows but does not hesitate to tease and flirt with her; it boosts Martha's self-image. Their genuine affection for each other is further evidenced by her silent understanding of his condition and her tender confession that she prays for him daily.

### *Other Characters*

All other characters are written in service to the story. Characters such as the Duenna exist to help forward the plot while occasionally providing an obstacle that another character must move. Carbon de Castel-Jaloux creates opportunities for Cyrano to show respect for the chain of command, while Montfleury best illustrates all that Cyrano finds repulsive, inartistic, and ridiculous. Other characters, such as the marquises, cadets, nuns, poets, cooks, and playgoers, all serve to reflect the sublime and grotesque environment the characters inhabit.

### *Idea and Theme*

*Cyrano de Bergerac* is a thematically rich play. The work explores the themes of friendship, duty, sacrifice, communication, beauty and freedom— all ideal elements that would be important to the Romantic structure of the play. While I believe that unconditional love— ideal love— is the primary theme driving the action of the play, it is important to explore other themes found in the work. A strong secondary theme of the play is friendship, which is supported by the ideas of duty and sacrifice. Friendship,

duty, and sacrifice are important characteristics of ideal love. Early in the play, it becomes evident that loyalty in friendship is a highly prized attribute amongst many characters. Le Bret shows sincere concern for Cyrano's actions, stubborn pride, and lonely heart. Cyrano values his friend Ragueneau and sternly chastises his unfaithful wife for her illicit behaviors. The camaraderie of the men on the battlefield and the eventual acceptance of the much-disliked De Guiche show that enmity can be laid aside in dire circumstances. Ironically, it is the friendship that blossoms between Christian and Cyrano over the course of the play that becomes the basis for the greatest sacrifice. If Cyrano did not in some way treasure and pity Christian, then he would have no reason to honor him in death by remaining silent about his love for Roxane. As valued as friendship may be, especially among the men, it becomes a bitter term for Cyrano when Roxane labels him, albeit warmly, as her friend. No hopeful lover happily suffers the demotion to friend. However, Cyrano willingly sacrifices the desired role of lover to take on that of devoted friend. It will, at least, make Roxane happy and, to his benefit, insure something of a future with her.

Although Cyrano makes sacrifices for his friends and for love, his failure to articulate the truth of the situation underscores another theme: the importance of honest and clear communication. This theme is repeatedly played out on several levels. Christian is identifiable through his lack of communicative skills. From the very beginning, he searches and fumbles for the words to express how he feels for Roxane, eventually allowing Cyrano to do the work for him. It is not until Christian doubts Roxane's love for him, on the battlefield, that he truly becomes eloquent. Cyrano, on the other hand, is the great communicator of the soul. His verbal tirades cannot be reined; his

opinions cannot be silenced. Cyrano rarely edits his vocal opinions whether those thoughts are encouraging or inflammatory. His wit, his poetry, and his presence command the attention of many, yet he is unable to share the truth of his love with Roxane. Instead, he hides behind the front of Christian and makes love to Roxane through the letters he writes. Even these disguised eloquences of love are shut down with the death of Christian. Cyrano's silence will ultimately cost him the happiness he has so longed for; the fear of rejection is too much.

Primarily, *Cyrano de Bergerac* seems to thematically explore the human desire to be loved unconditionally. The ideal lover, Cyrano, is marred only by his poor self-image. His profile, having taught him to remain on the defensive and defuse a situation quickly with wit and humor, has irrevocably locked him in a prison of insecurity. He manages to push all but a few select individuals away; it is easier to create enemies than to hope for friends. Cyrano's potential for love, nevertheless, is limitless and selfless. Hearing Roxane proclaim her love for the beautiful Christian, Cyrano forces his own bitter disappointment aside to embrace and coach her would-be suitor. This sacrifice culminates in Cyrano's aiding the secret marriage of Christian and Roxane, though it must torture his soul to do so. Upon Christian's death, Cyrano continues to keep love at arm's length, choosing instead to honor Christian's memory. Cyrano silences a perfect love for Roxane who loves the soul in the letters no matter his appearance. He has achieved what he most desired, but remains too timid to take it up.

The desire for unconditional love is also echoed in Christian, who realizes very keenly that though he is pretty, he is dim-witted and inarticulate. He must employ others to woo for him, whether that be Lignière or Cyrano. His impetuous youth welcomes

Cyrano's offer, though his decision proves costly as Roxane falls in love with the soul revealed in the letters. When the reality of the situation dawns on Christian, he is crushed. If Roxane does not love him for what he is, then it is no love at all. As Christian anguishes over the truth, he finally finds his voice. He eloquently convinces Cyrano to reveal the truth of the letters so that Roxane may choose which man she actually loves. Fate intervenes, Christian is shot, and Cyrano is left to carry on the charade, silenced in duty and honor. Nothing is gained in silence.

### *Conclusion*

In analyzing the play, I specifically looked for Rostand's treatment of the ideal in the language of the dialogue, in the character development, and in the thematic content. I also researched what other scholars had to say about the genre and style of Rostand's *comédie héroïque*. Both studies help reveal a particular style and theatricality inherent in the dialogue, one that needed to be articulated to both designers and actors. These stylistic values are created by Rostand's use of history, location, verse, character, and conflict to tell a deeply affecting and romanticized story. Like the title character, Rostand's play demands bold choices in concept and production style. By identifying these elements in analysis, I was better able to answer the questions of both designers and actors, guiding them towards a cohesive production celebrating the ideal.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Design Process

#### *Introduction*

The collaboration of the director and the design team is essential to the success of any production. That work is particularly important when dealing with such a design-heavy show as *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The tradition and history associated with the play create wonderful opportunities for designers to recreate period-appropriate costumes, iconic set pieces, and romantic mood lighting. Each independent element, however, must work together to ensure cohesive production values. As director, it is my job to clearly communicate my vision of the play to the designers so that, together, our efforts support the story told through the actor's work with the text.

#### *Production Style*

The size and scope of a play such as *Cyrano de Bergerac* demands a very specific production style. It is a work which transcends terms such as "Romantic" or "Neo-Classical," yet has elements of both genres. The cast size, the poetry of the language, the varied locales, and the subject matter all contribute to make this an epic production in every sense of the word. However, our version of *Cyrano de Bergerac* was approved under certain stipulations, primarily that the show be scaled back in order to meet budgetary constraints and tight deadlines, as departmental resources and manpower would be split between two shows almost simultaneously. In order to achieve the right look within the means available, I encouraged my design team to work towards a



Romantic simplicity, serving Rostand's story through line, shape, color, texture, silhouette, and realistic details: a place where the sublime and the grotesque met.

### *Choice of Stage*

Visualizing *Cyrano de Bergerac* outside of the traditional proscenium theatre is difficult to imagine, though it has been produced on an assortment of stages with varying degrees of success. The epic nature of the story, characters, and dialogue demand a venue that can support its larger-than-life qualities while at the same time highlighting the important intimate moments that form the heart of the story. Most often this is achieved through the use of a large proscenium or modified thrust theatre.

Baylor University's Department of Theatre Arts is currently housed in the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center, a building which houses three theatres of different design: a proscenium, a thrust, and a black box—all used intermittently according to the demands of season shows. The 2008-2009 season created interesting challenges in scheduling and space that had to be addressed by directors and designers alike. *Cyrano de Bergerac* was the third show, opening just after the Thanksgiving holiday break at the close of the semester. Due to the needs of the first two shows, *Cyrano de Bergerac* was predestined for the Jones Theatre, a proscenium space holding approximately 350 seats. As the largest stage in the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center, the Jones Theatre was the ideal choice for *Cyrano de Bergerac*. It allows for the storage of large set pieces in the wings (a feature which the other theatres lack), provides the most onstage space for the blocking of sword fights and crowd scenes, and has a unique alcove house right that was ultimately used as an entrance for Cyrano in the first act (see fig. A.1). The Jones Theatre also possesses a full fly-system that accommodates other scenic needs. These

requirements, which varied according to the different acts, included curtains, set pieces, lighting, the cyclorama and necessary masking to hide large set pieces.

Positives aside, the Jones Theatre also presents several directorial challenges; it is not a perfect space. The stage is deeper than it is wide. As a result, the acoustics onstage and throughout the house can be problematic. Voices and dialogue can easily be lost if the actors travel too far upstage. Additionally, actors positioned upstage of the proscenium arch often struggle to hear dialogue delivered downstage towards the audience; the fear of missing a cue line is ever present. This could be overcome by strong vocal projection on the part of the actors. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, the undergraduate students have little training to support filling such a space with their voices; it is difficult for them to project sufficiently without straining their vocal cords. Nevertheless, with the resources available to us, the Jones Theatre was the best choice for the production.

### *Collaboration with Designers*

Theatre is, by nature, a collaborative art. Directors depend upon the talents, inspiration, and originality of their designers to bring a production to life, all the while working to ensure that the final product presents a cohesive picture in support of the story. *Cyrano de Bergerac* presents unique personal challenges, primarily because it conjures strong images and emotions associated with an individual's prior experience with the popular show. Early on, my priority became finding a way to clearly communicate to designers what my personal vision was in order to inspire their work and to ignite their imaginations. The answer was research.

Prior to meeting with the designers, I sought specific prints, pictures, and paintings that I felt captured and supported my artistic vision. These images, I hoped, would allow me to succinctly and clearly articulate what was needed to create Rostand's ideal environment. Initially, I scoured through art books and internet articles focused on Romantic painters. I also conducted visual research on iconic set pieces, such as studying the architecture and detail of various balconies. I then examined resources from other productions to see how they had handled similar problems. Often, this was limited to still images available on the internet, but occasionally I would stumble upon a video clip such as the Cyrano-Valvert swordfight filmed during the most recent revival at the Comédie-Française. In addition, my research also compelled me to view available movie adaptations of the play, including Jean-Paul Rappeneau's version in the original French. I found the films particularly useful for costume, hair, and make-up elements, but their locations were either too high budget or too far removed from my vision of the play. Finally, I chose to take in live productions when available. In December of 2007, I traveled to New York City to watch David Leveaux's *Cyrano de Bergerac* production starring Kevin Kline. This trip allowed me to judge the creative achievements of a professional, commercial production. During the performance, I took several pages of notes but ultimately found little in the way of inspiration. The one exception would be the sound design, particularly in the fourth act, which I found added to the tension of the scene and raised the stakes of the action on stage. I was also able to see a production at Houston's Alley Theatre, directed by Gregory Boyd, after we were already several weeks into rehearsal. Though this trip came too late in the calendar to be of much service in design aspects, it did help me solve some problems with blocking and acting.

As I searched for ways to communicate my director's concept, I kept returning to the word "elemental." Conceptually, I wanted a production style that was beautiful and raw, natural and weathered. I found that the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, an early nineteenth-century German Romantic, best illustrated what I wanted to communicate. The most striking aspect of Friedrich's work was his ability to render epic scenes with striking silhouettes that cut across simple yet picturesque backgrounds. His use of line, color, and light were all elements I wanted to recreate on stage. In addition to Friedrich's work, I was also drawn to the work of Dutch master Rembrandt van Rijn. Though most of Rembrandt's subjects are contemporaneous to *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the mood of his paintings does not match the life, vitality, and romance of the play. Additionally, his color palette was markedly different from that of Friedrich. What I was most interested in, therefore, was Rembrandt's use of light, particularly as it draws the eye to specific areas of the painting. With a show as busy and populated as *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the audience needs to know where to concentrate their attention. I believed that if we were able to capture and combine the work of these two masters in our designs, then the final result would be an ideal world for *Cyrano*.

Initial conversations with the designers began in late July, a full five months prior to the opening of the show and continued throughout August. Unfortunately, due to my summer work schedule, I was out of town when dialoguing with the designers began. To help facilitate communication, I composed a PowerPoint presentation which was e-mailed to everyone before our first conference call. I found it useful to have a visual reference universally available when trying to talk to designers in rather abstract terms.

Since I was drawn to natural and elemental images, a majority of my conversations and supporting information reflected environmental beauty and texture. The visual presentation included pictures of raw gemstones, selected works of Friedrich and Rembrandt, pictures demonstrating use of space, and two pictures from other productions (one being the recent Broadway performance and the other a ballet adaptation). In talking with my set designer, we focused on terms such as stone, wood, and iron. Pictures presented to him consisted of landscapes, silhouetted architecture, detailed ironwork, old doors, and stone walls. For costumes, I drew upon the raw and natural state of precious gems. I had specific stones associated with particular characters such as garnet for De Guiche and rose quartz for Roxane. Other terms mentioned included earth tones or steel, particularly when related to lower class individuals or soldiers. Simplicity of line and emphasis on texture also figured prominently in the costume design discussions, due to the limited time and resources for their construction. With the student lighting designer, I directed her to the color palette of Friedrich's work as well as the intense focus of Rembrandt's paintings. Discussions were also held about environmental lighting, which is the recreation of a natural light source on stage. These conversations primarily addressed the candlelit chandeliers of the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the moonlight that illuminates the third and fifth acts.

My conversations with designers continued once the school year began, often in one-on-one meetings. The designers took my suggestions and began to bring their own unique ideas and research to the process. Scheduled meetings were planned primarily by the set designer and the student lighting designer. The costume designer preferred to work spontaneously, often asking me to come down as soon as I had a minute. Though

my work with the sound designer did not commence until late October, we collaborated through both scheduled meetings and spur-of-the-moment interactions. I found my designers to be extremely flexible and collaborative; they listened carefully to my vision and worked hard to achieve it with enthusiasm and energy.

### *Set Design*

The world Edmond Rostand envisioned for *Cyrano de Bergerac* contains qualities that are both epic and intimate. In his quest to present the ideal French story, reflecting a national and cultural pride, Rostand moves the action through five different locations. The first act takes place at the famous Hôtel de Bourgogne, a theatre known for its association with seventeenth-century masterworks and the *Académie française*. The second act provides a much more provincial and personal setting, while maintaining its French color: the bakery of the poet Ragueneau. In act three, Rostand transports the characters to a residential street and the home of Roxane in a respectable Parisian neighborhood. Illuminated by the moonlit night, her balcony, the focal point of the scene's action, is the embodiment of Romanticism. Rostand takes the action outside of Paris for the fourth act; the Siege of Arras is the sight of Gascon entrenchment during the climactic battle scene. Finally, Rostand contrasts the violence of the battlefield with the tranquility and intimacy of a convent's courtyard where Cyrano at last finds love as he dies at the conclusion of the play.

*Cyrano de Bergerac* presented several challenges particularly in regards to the size of the set pieces and the finances required to achieve the Romantic scope desired. Early on the designer suggested that we construct the set in moveable pieces which would be repeatedly reused throughout the course of the show. To differentiate their uses, each

reusable piece was to be painted a particular shade on one side and a contrasting shade on the other. This choice was intended to keep us within our budget yet allowed for the multiple locations that Rostand indicated in the script. With this course of action decided upon, the faculty designer set to work using Friedrich's paintings and his own historical research for inspiration.

The importance of the set design in the first act is that it brings attention to the meta-theatricality of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The action on stage is a play within a play. Both the set designer and I decided that a faux stage was desirable to help establish the scene. Initially, the stage at the Hôtel de Bourgogne was designed in a T-shape to create a short peninsular walkway which would extend downstage with steps lining either side. Columns would be used to delineate a faux proscenium. Unfortunately, the thrust-like walkway was eventually cut from the final design due to a series of factors which included added strain on the set change and a concern for the safety of the actors in the swordfight. The columns, however, were kept, though it was necessary to relocate them. Initially, the columns were placed alongside the existing proscenium arch of the Jones Theatre. This created both a visual problem, as they blocked the onstage seating of the nobility from the view of the audience, and a blocking problem, as they prohibited actors from entering and exiting through the portals. The columns were moved just upstage of the faux stage, adding weight to the center of the design and creating an element with which actors could interact (see fig. A.2).

Because classism is prevalent in the conflict of the first act, it was decided that the actual orchestra lift in the Jones Theatre would be used. It was partially lowered to indicate the pit so often referred to in the script. A platform and stairs would connect

the pit to the actual stage level. Additionally, there needed to be seating for the nobility, preferably where they could be seen by their fellow playgoers. Ideas that were suggested included bringing the balcony from the third act on as a theatre box, presented in profile and disguised with fabric. This idea was eliminated early in the design process because I wanted the balcony to be a special piece not previously seen when it appears in act three. In the end, a series of four wooden benches were used, two on either side of the stage. These benches could be reused in the bakery and were easy to transport.

Chandeliers were the last items approved for use in the first act. Rostand's dialogue calls for the candles to be lit as the characters make their way into the social atmosphere of the theatre. Because the Jonesfly system would be crowded with various lighting elements and soft goods, the chandeliers were to be painted in perspective and then outfitted with small flicker lights from the electrics department. They would be lowered for actors to light them before being flown to a standard height. Initially included in the design, the chandeliers were cut because of budgeting constraints. However, in early September we learned that we were coming in slightly under budget and the chandeliers could be restored. Due to the delay, the chandeliers were not finished and fully functional until the final dress rehearsal.

The second act, which takes place at the pastry house of Ragueneau, was always a rather straightforward design. The back wall of the bakery would be a scenic drop painted to represent the brick ovens, based upon pictures the set designer found during his research. By early August we had decided that this drop would be painted in earth tones, in gradation that lightened towards the bottom to help the costumes stand out. The top of the drop would be arched, smoky, and appear as if plaster were peeling. In



subsequent meetings with the technical director, though, we found that for financial reasons the drop would need to be squared off. This allowed the technical director to use stock platforms seemed together to build the backdrop. Therefore, instead of having an arched backdrop, the actual arch would be painted on the squared-off scenery. Normally this would be no problem, but the drop was designed to be about sixteen feet high and to square it off was to lose some of its Romantic appeal. The top and sides not covered by the drop would be backed by the cyclorama to finish the stage picture (see fig. A.3).

To populate the space in the bakery, I felt it necessary to fill it with café tables, chairs, baking counters, pots, pans, plates, cups, and numerous foodstuffs. The centerpiece of the scene was a long table that cut across the space on a diagonal. It would function as an object to create levels and tension as Cyrano and the cadets moved around, over, and across it, commanding the scene with their Gascon energy. My scenic designer originally suggested, for greater artistry in the transitions, that the table be constructed of several flat tabletops resting upon wooden sawhorses underneath. Additionally, he wanted the tops to be wrapped in canvas to emphasize their utility in the bakery. Neither idea came to fruition. The assembly was nixed because of stability issues; rather, the large table was composed of four wooden tables, identical in construction and braced for greater support. The canvas was eliminated due to time constraints.

The pit was raised during the set transition to allow use of the apron, while stairs and platforms from the first act were reused to create entrances to and exits from the bakery. Initially there was only one exit designed upstage right. Since most of the entrances into the patisserie were blocked from upstage left, a second entrance was added there; it appeared as if customers descended into the shop from street level to mingle and

do business. To highlight the intimate duet scenes within the act, the set designer and I intended for Cyrano to construct a make-shift table for his letter compositions and conversation with Roxane. This was never realized as I had trouble working it into the blocking and timing of the scene and could not justify the random materials on stage. Ragueneau's personal desk would consequently serve Cyrano as well.

The third act had several prerequisites that required creative problem solving. First, there is the traditional balcony which must support weight, be illuminated from within, conceal characters underneath, and be moved onstage with relative ease. Second, Cyrano must be able to climb up another set piece— usually a tree— and fall as if from the moon. The construction of the items must somehow suggest a neighborhood street as well. My original idea of having the balcony sit approximately seven feet from the proscenium did not work as characters' entrances and exits needed to be masked from the audience. As a result, the balcony rested against the stage left proscenium arch. To solve the problem of Cyrano's supposed fall from the sky as well as to help create the idea of a larger residence, my designer and I decided on a large wall which would extend out from the balcony towards center stage.

To help establish the idea of a neighborhood street and to help anchor the space upstage right, the set designer reused platforms, steps, and created an arch based upon structures in Friedrich's work. This would be Clomire's house and sight of the lecture visited by Roxane and her Duenna during the act. Once again, budget constraints compelled us to redesign and the arch of Clomire's house was cut. In its place, we moved the existing columns from the first act to serve as a surrogate entrance to the residence. A smaller wall was added to Clomire's residence to give it the appearance of

continuing offstage; this wall also scenically echoed the larger wall of Roxane's home. Finally, a stone bench was placed beneath the balcony and in front of the large wall to create the idea of a small garden or courtyard (see fig. A.4).

Historically, the Siege of Arras had been designed in any number of ways; there is no tradition connected with the act, unlike the famous balcony scene that precedes it. I kept returning to the idea of a fortified bridge, behind which the Gascon regiment had taken refuge. I wanted the bridge to be something that could be walked on, crawled under, and scaled during the height of battle. My set designer believed this to be a strong choice and began to play with the details of the set piece. Originally, it was to span most of the stage and contain two vaulted arches underneath. Once again we fell victim to budget and time constraints. The bridge was shortened both in length and in height, resulting in only one vault below (see fig. A.5). Another piece which was eliminated due to financial limitations was a scenic piece representing debris that was to rest upstage left. To compensate, the rest of the space was littered with items such as barrels, crates, a broken wagon, guns, swords, pikes, and rubble to create the realistic environment of an army at war.

One idea that the designer wished to add was a large flag that would stretch tent-like down from the bridge over rubble. He emphasized the flag would be symbolic, blood-stained, torn, muddied and generally unusable. I argued against its use because it went contrary to the script. Carbon de Castel-Jaloux specifically tells Roxane that they have no flag and her handkerchief is to serve as their standard in battle. I also did not wish to introduce a symbolic element onstage when we had not established any other in

the acts prior to this one. The flag was cut from the final design, though pikes were added to the upstage side of the bridge, giving the impression of fortification.

For the final act of the play, there was surprisingly little discussion about the design of the church garden. It was understood that all the elements for the convent would be items reused from previous scenes. As a result, the bridge was spun to reveal a bricked walkway, covered in ivy, which would rest upstage near the cyclorama. Likewise, the wall from the third act was reversed, placed stage right, and used to back the embroidery stand and chair set up by the nuns. The columns, steps, and platforms were set up stage left to represent the entry into the church. An old well pulled from stock was refurbished to anchor the downstage left space (see fig. A.6).

Because so much of the dialogue in the final act revolves around the autumnal setting, the set designer and I were left with the problem of whether or not to incorporate a tree trunk or grove of trees. Neither of us wanted a poorly constructed or awkwardly immovable representation of a tree. Though he suggested symbolic branches emanating from behind the wall, I again dissuaded him from the use of anything that was not truly representative of the item. We compromised by having leaves scattered on the stage floor during the scene change as well as dropping them sporadically and strategically from the front of house catwalk during performances. Lights would then be used to suggest tall branches beyond the audience's sight lines.

The paint scheme, initially ambitious, had to be scaled down due to two factors. First, we were dealing with two-sided scenic pieces; one side would be painted to represent grey slate while the other would be golden sandstone. The two colors would be blended and shaded together where they met on the sides. Second, two show builds were

happening simultaneously. While designated days were assigned to focus on *Cyrano de Bergerac*, it simply was not enough time to complete the look intended— which was rough, weathered, aged.

A majority of the set pieces were built upon casters for greater mobility. With actors and crews divided between two productions, we were limited to a small run crew, smaller than a show of this size needs. From the beginning, my solution to this problem was to have the cast act as the onstage run crew, in charge of every set change that happened in front of the audience's eyes. My original intention for these entrances was for the cast to be tightly choreographed, the sets changing in silhouette while music played to cover the noise. We were able to achieve the look with the lights and cover the noise with the music, but I was never able to choreograph the moves as tightly as I wished. The size of the show meant that set pieces were still being completed just prior to tech rehearsals, and we were only able to schedule one rehearsal devoted to the numerous set changes.

### *Costumes*

*Cyrano de Bergerac*, set in the seventeenth century, presents wonderful opportunities to research, design, and construct period costumes. The costume designer, assistant designers, and staff were all extremely excited to work on a historic piece, in spite of the imposing workload and looming deadlines. In keeping with my concept of the elemental, we focused largely on a raw jewel-tone color palette with simple lines and natural textures. An undertone of grey or brown was always present in our fabric choices in order to keep extremely bright or harsh colors from standing out on stage; we aimed for a soft maturity in the color palette. Ornamentation was kept to a minimum, with

characters such as the Viscount de Valvert and the Count de Guiche being the most elaborate. Cyrano, Roxane, and Christian were to be the ideal Romantic leads whose costumes fit both their station in life and the heroic image of the time period.

The size of the cast for *Cyrano de Bergerac* presents many challenges for a costume department whose time and energies are already split between two shows. Therefore it was necessary to start the design and construction process as early as possible— even prior to casting the show. It has been my experience that the costume designer does his or her research, roughly renders the costumes, and then brings them to the director for approval or modification. Once these rough renderings are finalized, designs are completed and matched with swatches of potential fabric. The costume designer for *Cyrano de Bergerac* chose an entirely different approach. She chose to shop for fabric prior to rendering the designs and prior to my casting the show. My concerns were manifold. What if the fabrics chosen did not suit the complexion of the actor? What if the fabrics purchased ultimately depleted our budget without serving the design of the show? What if the material was wrong for the rendering? As a result, I asked if I could join her when she went shopping. Together we were able to compromise on a majority of the fabrics, having found several items on clearance.

Once the show was cast, their work began in earnest. The characters were rendered in the cavalier style according to their station in life— whether humble, such as Ragueneau, or rich, such as Carbon de Castel-Jaloux. Because *Cyrano de Bergerac* is such an ensemble show, many of the third and fourth level characters were not rendered. Rather the job of the assistant costume designers was to search through storage and pull items that could either work or be adapted to fit the time period, according to the color

palette we had agreed upon. Costumes which ultimately came from stock included many elements of the Gascon soldiers, the pages, Lignière's entire costume, dresses and accessories (shawls, capes, head coverings) for ladies and other playgoers, shoes and boots as well as some hats. A group effort from the start, many of the cast members also served on costume crew. Several soldiers were asked to sew their own pants or steam their own hats. One individual even became the "boot master" whose job it was to check out boots for rehearsal, pull from stock, and design period shoes for the gentlemen.

Characters whose costumes were rendered and constructed included Cyrano, Roxane, Christian, De Guiche, Le Bret, Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, Ragueneau, Lise, the Duenna, Valvert, Montfleury, the Musketeer, Jodelet, the Actresses, the Marquises, and the Nuns. Construction began with stays for the women and shirts for the men. The first costume to be finished in its entirety was that of Cyrano, as it was needed for publicity purposes.

Cyrano must strike us as the ideal romantic hero, swashbuckling and daring. His design included a weathered amethyst fabric— heavily textured— for his doublet and breeches, a white undershirt, black boots, black hat with white feathered panache, and a grey cape worn under the shoulder. To finish off the look, he was given a black leather belt, complete with buckled sword hanger and rapier (see fig. B.1). Since the character is often described as poor, we felt no need to have him change clothes throughout the first four acts. However, since the fifth act takes place some fifteen years later, modifications were necessary. Cyrano lost his doublet, wore the cape across his chest, and exchanged his sword for a cane. In the last few days before opening, I even tried to find another hat that we could shape and weather, making his normally white *panache* dingy grey;

unfortunately, I was unable to find a cavalier hat that would work even after calling and visiting a number of stores in Dallas over the Thanksgiving holiday.

The budget was the major limiting factor when it came to Roxane. Both the designer and I believed Roxane should have a different costume each act as she was a woman of considerable respectability, and what she wore to the theatre would not be the same outfit worn to a bakery. Much like the set design, we decided to see which elements could be reused throughout the course of the show. For the theatre, Roxane was rendered in a dim topaz, accessorized with sheer, pale green trim and a cape. This same dress would be reused in the third act without the cape (see fig. B.2). It would appear different under the cool moonlight, compared with the warm candlelight of the theatre. For Roxane's visit to the bakery, we had originally purchased a rose quartz colored satin. The problem, though, was that we needed to reuse some aspect of this costume on the battlefield in the fourth act, and pink was not the best choice. The dress was then changed to a steel grey, trimmed with pink, and accessorized with a pink lace mantle (see fig. B.3). The skirt was then reused in the fourth act, paired with a blue and burgundy, military-styled bodice. For the final act, Roxane appeared in a conservative black skirt, bodice, and veil which reflected her eternal mourning for Christian (see fig. B.4).

Christian's costume underwent a series of changes—relatively unrelated to the original design. His doublet was fabricated from a pale blue and grey-green striped material that befitted both his nobility and his beauty. At the first dress rehearsal, though, Christian's doublet was closed at the neck, ill-fitting, and baggy. His pants were constructed of a bright turquoise fabric that neither matched his doublet nor the color palette for the production. His hat had not yet been steamed into shape or accessorized



with feathers, and his pale grey cape with peach lining did not compliment his doublet. Immediately my directing advisor pointed this out and together we made suggestions to fix the problem. I volunteered, over the break, to buy new fabric for the pants and the cape in Dallas, where there would be more selection available. The assistant costume designer agreed to both shorten and take-in the doublet significantly as well as open up the neckline. The hat would be finished over the break as well, complete with feathers and a pin. In the end, Christian's entire finished costume was not ready until opening night, but the result was worth the wait (see fig. B.5).

The work done for De Guiche and Valvert was focused on calling attention to their rank and class, as well as their self-importance. De Guiche was rendered in garnet, with a black cape and hat, lace collar, black hose, black leather gauntlets and red shoes (see fig. B.6). In the fourth act, in addition to boots, a breast plate was added to signify his military rank. For the final act, the designer and I knew that something had to be different, as De Guiche had continued to climb the ranks of society and court; he could not be seen in the same costume. Nevertheless, there was not enough time or resources to pull together a new costume and in the end we were forced to compile something suitable from stock, a black doublet trimmed in red with black pants. Valvert's costume proved to be an expertly designed testament to his own self-centeredness, calling attention to both his arrogance and foppery. Designed in bright cream trimmed with gold ribbon, the entire outfit caught the eye immediately— from the tall, cream-colored hat to the ornately puffed sleeves. The actor, who played multiple roles, wore a cavalier wig as well as a goatee and mustache over a powdered face (see fig. B.7). The completed ensemble reflected the foolishness and misplaced confidence of his character.

Le Bret and Ragueneau were designed as befit their stations. Le Bret, conservative and respectable, was dressed in a dull navy doublet and breeches with boots (see fig. B.8). There was no ornamentation to Le Bret, as he never calls attention to himself in the least. To age Le Bret in the final act, he was given a mustard yellow doublet and grey cape. Ragueneau's limitations are the result of his generous spirit and subsequent poverty. Since Ragueneau is chiefly known for his baking skills, the designer and I felt that his costume should match a world filled with flour, ovens, and pastries. Designed with earth tones and baking goods in mind, Ragueneau was given three outfits: one for the theatre, one for the bakery (see fig. B.9), and one for the final act where it is evident that misfortune has plagued his poor life. These changes were accomplished by simply varying the hat, doublet, or shirt as well as adding accessories such as an apron.

The Duenna functions as Roxane's guardian and a protector of her virtue. The designer and I chose to dress her in a severe gray and black outfit, replete with bonnet and mantle, in keeping with her position and duties (see fig. B.10). Lise, the straying wife of Ragueneau, is decidedly less conservative. While keeping her color palette close to those of Ragueneau's, Lise's chemise and stays were designed to reveal her feminine attributes as well as loose morals (see fig. B.11). The focus of Lise's affection, of course, is the dashing Musketeer who was rendered with the historically accurate blue tabard, embroidered with the king's insignia.

A reversible dark grey and steel taffeta, originally purchased for Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, was actually reassigned to Roxane during the design process. The replacement material was equally impressive, a metallic textured grey in keeping with the concept of steel. Introduced in the second act, Carbon is every bit the respected and

spirited leader of the Gascon regiment, his polished appearance capped off with hat, baldric, and sword. To show the tribulations of battle in the fourth act, his doublet was opened and shirt disheveled. The costumes of Gascon soldiers, led by Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, were a mixed lot, largely pulled from stock. The few exceptions were the Marquises, historic individuals who also served with Cyrano in the cadets. The three Marquises were designed to be highly fashionable yet more masculine in their appearance than the Viscount de Valvert (see fig. B.6). As the play progressed, the Marquises grew more casual in their appearance, losing lace collars, opening up their doublets, and eventually changing into humble, distressed pieces for the battlefield.

The play opens with a performance of *La Clorise* by Balthazar Baro. In my research, I learned that this obscure play was actually a pastoral romance. As Montfleury is lambasted for being fat as well as a poor actor, the decision was made to build the costume over a padded suit. In keeping with the bucolic theme, Montfleury was designed as a shepherd with Bacchanalian qualities. Since the actor playing Montfleury was also playing Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, great efforts were made to disguise his appearance. These included a grey wig, curled beard, and elaborate headpiece. Montfleury's company, comprised in this production of the Actresses and Jodelet, were designed to complement the bright colors of Montfleury's costume. A harlequin print was added as ornamentation to each of the company's outfits to relate them to each other.

Where *Cyrano de Bergerac* begins on a festive and bright note, it ends on a somber and dark one. The Sisters of the Holy Cross convent in Paris present a uniquely peaceful and prayerful contrast to the soldiers and siege of the previous act. Historically, the nuns are dressed in white. This is confirmed in Rostand's dialogue when Roxane, in

black, is compared to a raven among the white doves of the church. Due to time constraints, all nuns—regardless of rank—were rendered and constructed identically. An ivory habit was covered by a cream-colored tabard embroidered with a red cross (see fig. B.12). The coifs and wimples were ivory and the veils black; beaded rosaries were made from purchased craft materials and tied around their waists. Initially the hems of the nuns were constructed too short which would have been considered inappropriate for their station; this was fixed just prior to opening.

All other characters within the play were designed by piecing together costumes from stock. These included the various playgoers: ladies, a shop girl, a guard, a pickpocket, and pages. The costumes of the various cooks, poets, musicians, and pages were also pulled from stock, including accessories such as hats and aprons. The fully rendered design for Lignière was actually based upon elements in stock. Conversely, the Friar's costume, which was never rendered, ultimately had to be constructed from scratch. Originally sown from leftover pale grey shirt material, the costume was dyed brown prior to performance. For the ensemble, accessories such as capes, rings, collars, gloves, sword hangers, rapiers, hats, feathers, and aprons ensured a polished final product that faithfully served to recreate the era.

### *Make-Up and Hair*

No production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is complete without the nose. Together with the prosthetics crew member, I searched through various production photos and movie stills looking for the perfect nose. I knew I did not want something too bulbous, disfigured, aquiline or phallic. Rather, I wanted something that suggested nothing more than a length worthy of self-consciousness. The prosthetics artist and I agreed that the

nose designed for Kevin Kline in the David Leveaux production on Broadway was closest to our vision for the play. After a few days of research, the prosthetic technician found a website that offered the perfect nose. Upon approval from the costume designer, five noses were ordered for rehearsals and performance. Composed of latex and foam rubber, the nose was adhered to the actor's face with a prosthetic adhesive. To make the look more uniform, liquid latex was used to create a smooth surface where the nose attached to the face. Finally make-up was applied to the artificial nose and the actor's face for color consistency.

The actor who played Cyrano was also given a false mustache and goatee to complete the cavalier look. Though they matched his hair color perfectly, there were numerous problems with the mustache in particular. After trying several different adhesives and numerous reapplications, the actor had little success keeping the artificial hair in place. This was caused by a number of reasons, including the fact that Cyrano has the most lines and his lips are constantly over-articulating the poetic language. After puzzling over the problem, I finally decided to scratch the artificial mustache in favor of crepe hair. Using several shades of synthetic hair, I mixed and matched them until they best resembled the actor's natural hair color. I then cut small sections and applied them in quarter-inch increments along his upper lip using spirit gum, trimming them to the appropriate length. The idea was that if one section came off, it would not carry the rest of the mustache with it. The other make-up crew members watched and were charged with completing this tedious but effective solution night after night. During performance, the mustache never came off.

As mentioned, both Valvert and Montfleury were given period wigs as well as false facial hair to complete their characters' appearance. These decisions were made primarily because these actors were playing other prominent roles and we needed to differentiate their appearance between the characters as much as possible. Additionally, various actors were asked to grow full beards such as those playing Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, De Guiche, Lignière, Ragueneau, and Le Bret; others simply grew goatees and mustaches. Christian, in particular, was asked to remain clean shaven, in order to better reflect his youth.

As a rule, the men of the cast were asked to refrain from cutting their hair. Some had even grown their hair out in anticipation of auditions. The result was a variety of lengths on stage, reflecting the style of the period. For the women, especially Roxane and other ladies of nobility, hairstyles were recreated after research done on the seventeenth century. Hair was tightly curled and pinned up along the sides with a bun in the back. Make-up was usually done with a light touch, the major exception being the fops whose faces were powdered and rouged according to their status.

### *Properties*

Perhaps the most intimidating production aspect of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is the property list, which is almost as lengthy as the play itself. Nevertheless, the props are an integral part of the action and help create the environment which shapes the characters. The collaborative efforts of the set designer, the costume designer, the property mistress, her faculty supervisor, the set crew, the costume crew, and the paint crew were all necessary to successfully buy, build, or borrow the hundreds of hand and scenic props.

One of the most challenging acts to supply was the second, set in Ragueneau's bakery. This working bakery also doubles as a café where poets and soldiers come to eat regularly. For this reason, it was important that we have a large variety of breads and pastries in various forms of completion as well as serving platters, goblets, pitchers, wooden plates, napkins, rolling pins, and pots. Unfortunately, Baylor University's inventory is sadly lacking in both artificial foods and period appropriate flatware. Through various connections, however, we were able to borrow a number of wooden plates, bowls, serving trays, and pewter goblets.

Financially, we could not afford to continually buy and serve fresh bread, sausage, and pastries. There were several solutions to this problem. Some items were carved out of Styrofoam and painted to resemble their edible counterparts. A great deal of real bread was bought and shellacked for temporary preservation. However, during the collection process, I noticed that most of the baked goods bought were too modern in appearance. After questioning the properties mistress, I understood that she had no background knowledge of artisan breads or French mainstays such as baguettes or éclairs. She was also limited by a lack of local bakeries with international variety. To solve the problem, I again volunteered to shop the Dallas area over the Thanksgiving break in order to find what we needed at a decent price. I was able to purchase several artisan breads, including French baguettes, country miches, puffed pastries, lemon madeleines, and whole grain loaves that looked period appropriate.

Another act that proved particularly difficult was the Siege at Arras. Every soldier needed to be fitted with a sword hanger—whether baldric or belt. Several individuals volunteered to meet this need. My fight choreographer ordered a few for the

school to have; others were loaned from former students of the department. Finally, several were handcrafted out of leather by a member of the costume crew. Luckily, there were enough swords in stock, both rapier and épée, to ensure that each soldier was well-armed. For other weapons of war, though, the set and paint crew found themselves busy handcrafting pikes and powder horns from scratch. Muskets from stock were touched up and fitted with leather straps to make them easier to carry.

The property mistress also had the responsibility of creating parchment and writing the untold numbers of letters and poems used throughout the show. Tea-soaked paper and calligraphy pens were used in abundance, as the actress playing Lise nightly ripped some poems to shreds while using others as pastry bags—effectively ruining their appearance. Furthermore, several copies of the same letter were needed to represent its journey through time. For example, Cyrano first composes his farewell letter to Roxane on the battlefield where it is essentially flawless except for a few tear stains. This letter gets transferred to Christian, who is subsequently shot. The actor playing Christian was responsible for switching out the first letter for a freshly bloodstained one. Finally, the letter is kept as a relic by Roxane and revealed some fifteen years later. This final version was worn with age, and the blood upon it was dark and dried.

These few paragraphs only suggest the hundreds of props actually used in the course of the play. Other needs included but were not limited to coins, money purses, canes, staffs, baskets, candles, rosaries, musical instruments, books, and handkerchiefs; all were designed to reflect the craftsmanship of the time period. The organization required to keep track of all the props was also a major undertaking. Several prop tables were set up on both sides of the stage; each was marked with two different colors of tape



as some props were stowed and others set at intermission. Sword stands were made and labeled so that each soldier had a specific location to place their weapon when not in use. Each actor assigned a rapier reported to the stage manager after the performance in order to check their weapon back into sword lockup. The assistant stage managers and run crew were also responsible for the nightly clean-up of several bottles, stew pots, plates, and countertops that saw perishable food use. They also swept up the autumn leaves that dotted the stage floor. The success of the venture was largely due to the collaborative effort of the cast, crew, and faculty—all of whom worked tirelessly to ensure that the props of *Cyrano de Bergerac* accurately represented the time period and served the action of the story.

### *Lighting*

The student lighting designer for *Cyrano de Bergerac* had multiple responsibilities, which were handled quite professionally. To begin with, the designer had the task of making sure that the faces of the actors were illuminated enough to be seen—even though two acts take place in the evening. She also worked to create romanticized environments, helped establish the mood of the different acts, and visually illustrated the passing of time. Her major responsibility, however, was helping to direct the audience's attention to the main action of the story, especially in crowded scenes filled with activity.

The basis of the design was founded in the color palette of Friedrich's paintings. The first act was warmly lit, reflecting the candlelight of the chandeliers. Diffused spotlights were used to follow the main actors who carried the responsibility of exposition. The act also possessed a hazy quality, reflected of the crowds, smoke, and

confinement of the theatre itself. As a last minute request, I asked if we could add a blue special, which would spill through the stage right portal representing Paris by moonlight. My designer was quick to respond in the affirmative and the effect, though small, was achieved.

In the pastry shop of the second act, the lighting designer created an atmosphere full of energy illuminated by early morning daylight spilling through the particulate of flour and smoke from a working bakery. Initially, the colors focused on the cyclorama were meant to match the peach-hued earth tones of the oven drop. I found that they worked against the scene, creating a dissonance in the visual picture. Together we played with various colors: blues, greens, pinks, and purples. It was hard to decide what direction to take with the stage picture. Ultimately, the scenery should have covered the entire wall but financially this was not an option. We eventually decided on a fair shade of purple, which complimented the orange hues in the scenery while maintaining some representation of the dawn (see fig. C.1). To complete the scene, window-patterned gobos spilled bright sunshine onto the upstage floor of the bakery. Noting that they were too far upstage early in the process, my requests to move them downstage were denied. The balcony for act three was tightly stored behind the proscenium and blocked the use of the ladders and dimmers mounted there. As a result, these beautiful streams of sunlight were ultimately lost in the action.

The balcony scene of the third act, unlike any other act in the play, requires the perfect romantic mood lighting. It must illuminate Roxane's beauty while disguising the deceptive wooing of Cyrano and Christian. To achieve this look, the lighting designer employed cool-colored gels. Gels are colored sheets of plastic inserted into the light

which change the color projected onstage. Our goal, in the third act, was to simulate the light of a full moon (see fig. C.2). During technical rehearsals, though, I remarked that it was too brightly lit. Logically, the audience must believe that Cyrano is hidden in the dark. My designer agreed with my assessment and brought the levels down. In hindsight, however, I believe we were too conservative in lowering the intensity. A gobo, or pattern, of leaf breakup was also used to help romanticize the appearance of the balcony, helping to complete the look.

One vitally important element to the scene is, of course, the full moon. Several options were discussed for the moon, including a moon box—a large lit box placed behind the cyclorama—and various patterned gobos inserted into lights. The moon box was quickly discarded because of its harsh fluorescence. A lovely glass gobo was chosen instead. A major problem, though, was the proximity of the light to the cyclorama and the angle of the beam. This caused the moon to appear slightly oblong (see fig. C.3). To sort through the problem, the lighting designer, her faculty advisor, the master electrician, and I all met one afternoon to examine our options. These included substituting metal gobos with crescent moon patterns in place of the glass gobo as well as refocusing and re-hanging the light. The metal patterns took away the romance of the moon, looking rather like a scar on the cyclorama instead of earth's solitary satellite. Refocusing the light brought the moon to its proper shape but pulled it above the sightline of the audience. Re-hanging the light threatened to drop it into audience view. Ultimately I was forced to live with an oblong moon, which, oddly enough, burnt out prior to the penultimate performance. This was noted in the performance report but never corrected for the final

show. I found I would rather have the misshapen moon than no moon at all; the stage manager had not followed-up on the burnt-out bulb.

The fourth act began rather dramatically, with the main drape rising after intermission to reveal a battlefield in silhouette. In order to achieve the desired look, the lighting designer backlit the scene with red lights on the cyclorama while filling the stage with fog and haze (see fig. C.4). The rest of the act, prior to the actual battle, was lit as a grey and bleak dawn, reflecting the general attitude of the weary soldiers. Once the battle began, certain lighting effects were used to indicate cannon and musket fire, coordinated to overlap simultaneously with various sound effects. Diffused spotlights were used to help direct the audience's focus during these chaotic moments.

There were several challenges to lighting the fourth act. First, the fog machine rarely managed to achieve the desired look at the opening of the act. Multiple attempts were made to solve the problem; these included starting the fog at different times, directing the actors to remain absolutely still behind the main drape, and placing the fogger in different locations. In the end, we abandoned the cooling unit and just pumped the particulate behind the curtain. Night after night, the result was always different; some nights it appeared as if there was no fog at all while on others it was distractingly thick. This was in part due to a series of uncontrollable factors including the actors' movement, the opening and closing of backstage doors, the ventilation system, and the raising of the main drape. When the fog machine was used to represent the smoke from the cannon blasts, though, it successfully added a brutal dimension to the scene.

Another challenge in the fourth act was mastering the numerous cue calls during the battle sequence, particularly those that aligned with cannon blasts and musket fire. It

is the stage manager's job to tell board operators when to go with their next cue, communicating via headset. Throughout technical and dress rehearsals, a solid rhythm was found that worked. However, after a five day break for the Thanksgiving holiday, it was difficult for the stage manager and board operators to repeat their previously polished cadence. As a result, some nights the sound of cannon would be heard prior to the light flash while on others, the light would flare independent of the sound effect. When the elements did work together, the result was a spectacular barrage of sight and sound that elevated the scene to a dynamic level.

For the final act, the lighting designer was able to wonderfully create the warmth and softness of an autumnal sunset. Patterned breakup was used to signify the invisible tree branches and various glass gobos produced isolated clouds on the faux horizon (see fig. C.5). As dictated by the dialogue and action, the lights gradually dimmed to reflect the setting sun and deepening darkness. As Cyrano fought his last battle, the moonlight reappeared, this time as a directional beam from the house, illuminating the poet-swordsman one last time. The final picture, isolated in the darkness, was of the dead Cyrano cradled in the arms of his dearest friends lit only by the moonlight (see fig. C.6). The still moment, visually, was a fitting conclusion to the epic play.

### *Sound*

The sound designer for *Cyrano de Bergerac* was extremely busy, not only because he was working on two shows at once, but because he was serving as the faculty prop supervisor for both productions as well. As a result, we were not able to meet and discuss the play's concept until well into October. The needs for my play were relatively straightforward; the designer listened carefully and assured me that my requests were

feasible. Over the next several weeks, we worked closely together to create everything from environmental background noise to the controlled cacophony of a battle. Often mixing and layering sounds, the designer used standard available effects as well as those recorded live in the studio.

Apart from the recorded cues, the show also employed various live sound effects. In the second act, small bells signaled the arrival and departure of customers to Ragueneau's bakery. Operated by the assistant stage manager, the bells were timed to coincide with multiple entrances and exits. During the battle, live rounds (blanks) were shot by the assistant stage managers from three guns backstage. Deliberately fired at strategic points, these shots usually represented the Gascon muskets. The one exception was the live shot used to "kill" Christian, as it was important for the effect to stand out from the others.

Early on it was decided that any music featured during the course of the action would be live and dictated by the script. This essentially meant that the actors playing the musicians had to be talented artists in their own right, who could spotlight their music in important moments as well as fade into the background when appropriate. For the set changes, however, we knew it would be necessary to cover the noise of the casters and the business of the actors moving the scenery. The designer requested that I work to select the music for the set changes and curtain call as my knowledge of appropriate period-sounding music exceeded his own. After finding what I thought worked, I would bring the selections to him for approval.

In designing the set change cues, both the designer and I decided to have the music lead in under the last few lines of the act to help facilitate a fluid transition.

During the middle of the set change, the music would then cross-fade to a different song. Our goal was to establish a mood for the upcoming act by preparing the audience aurally. The most difficult cue to design musically was curtain call, as no one song captured the tone of the final moments as well as the energy needed for the bows of twenty-eight actors. In the end, three different songs were edited together to create the cue.

While I focused on the various music cues, my sound designer focused on the recorded environmental effects. These included everything from leaves blowing in the wind to the drums that signaled an advancing Spanish army. To begin the show, we decided two single drum beats, timed with the rise of the curtain, would be sufficient to capture the attention of the audience. The rest of the first act was intermittently interrupted by the opening or closing of the doors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The third act held the distant chirping of nighttime crickets and the drums signaling the regiment's departure to war. The fifth act incorporated the rustling of the leaves in the wind and the mournful toiling of a church bell to signal both the hour and the call to prayer. The fourth act, however, provided the greatest challenges for the designer. Together, we sat down and went over the script paying finite attention to any line that referenced a gunshot, cannon, or drumbeat. After compiling a thorough list, we were able to secure a drummer from the music school who owned an historic military drum. We recorded a series of drum rolls and cadences that were later used in the fourth act. Additionally, the designer worked to compile a wide range of period appropriate battle effects including explosions, cannon fire, musket fire, horses, and carriages. The resulting series of cues, when timed with the action and lights, was powerfully dramatic and succeeded in raising the stakes within the scene.

### *Conclusion*

The various design aspects for *Cyrano de Bergerac* were instrumental in helping convey the heroic attributes of Rostand's play. The addition and combination of these elements during technical and dress rehearsals affects the actors in a myriad of ways. The costumes change the posture and pacing of the actors; the scenic elements give the actors an environment to work against, and the lights set the tone of the scene. For all the beauty and artistry evident in the completed design process, the actors' abilities must warrant such sweeping romanticism on stage in the power of their performance. That power must be found in rehearsal.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Rehearsal Process

#### *Introduction*

The rehearsal process provides time for the actors and the director to explore the action of the story through movement, characterization, vocal inflection, and facial expression. My duties as a director are not only to define the production style of the piece but to clearly articulate that to the actors, providing them with a safe environment in which to take risks and make discoveries. *Cyrano de Bergerac* comes with its own unique set of challenges due to the epic content and heroic characters featured within the story. The problems that these challenges present must be solved collaboratively in rehearsal. The end result, combined with all the design elements, should result in a moving production that communicates Rostand's story of love and sacrifice.

#### *Play Interpretation and Acting Style*

With few exceptions, directors of *Cyrano de Bergerac* have differed little in their interpretation of Rostand's work throughout the play's production history. Edward Freeman makes this observation in his critical work *Edmond Rostand: Cyrano de Bergerac*. He writes that it is "a curious fact of theatrical history that throughout a long series of productions, all more or less successful, there has been little variation in directorial style and interpretation" (48). Certainly exceptions do exist, but they are far from the norm.

The problem with developing a concise directorial interpretation or a particular acting style is that *Cyrano de Bergerac* tends to elude simple classification. Comparisons can be made both in content and form to the classical dramas of Corneille, the comedies of Molière, the stock characters of Italian commedia dell'arte, the meta-theatricality of Shakespeare, and the Romanticism of Hugo. The director must have a clear understanding of how these elements combine to create the popular boulevard drama or the *comédie-heroïque*, as Rostand termed it. Additionally, directors, designers, actors, and audiences alike all approach the play from an intensely personal perspective with specific expectations and strong opinions, a clear indication of *Cyrano de Bergerac*'s universal appeal.

Although Rostand was a contemporary of realistic playwrights such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Zola, and Shaw, his writing is often considered, in part, a rebellion against the dark content and pervading disillusionment that fueled their new works. To base the production entirely on the precepts of naturalism would result in a poor, lifeless imitation of Rostand's work. When working with undergraduate actors whose roots are firmly entrenched in realism, however, it provides a place to start, as the emotion of the characters should be rooted in truth. Beginning with common Stanislavskian terms such as given circumstances, objectives, and action helps generate a dialogue between the director and actors from which to build the performance. A starting point is not an ending point though, and actors must understand that the story of *Cyrano de Bergerac* demands a performance that is heightened through its use of poetic language, energized by action set against the backdrop of history, and carried along by the sacrificial story of an ideal love.

Our approach to *Cyrano de Bergerac* took into consideration not only the language and mythical scope of the story, but also the audience, primarily composed of undergraduate theatre appreciation students. For them, the story needed to be accessible, entertaining, and relatable. To best capture and maintain their attention, I chose to treat the work as a period style not unlike Shakespeare and other epic classical works, mixing presentational moments of energetic declamation with still moments of tragic realization. It is important to clarify here that the word "still" does not mean "quiet." Rostand's characters, particularly Cyrano, speak volumes in their pain. For Cyrano, words are a first line of defense. Nevertheless, the temptation to play the title role bombastically should be tempered by an acknowledgement of his humanity.

#### *Auditions and Casting*

One of the stipulations for getting *Cyrano de Bergerac* approved for production was reducing the size of the cast. At first glance, Rostand's masterpiece seems to be constructed for an ensemble cast exceeding seventy-five individuals. Although the thought of such a massive cast is both exciting and intimidating, I needed to reduce the cast size to a more manageable number, between twenty-five and thirty actors. This number stayed flexible throughout the audition process, primarily because the division of women's roles and decisions on double-casting allowed for variability. In the end, twenty-eight actors would be used to play a total of sixty different roles.

Preliminary auditions for *Cyrano de Bergerac* were held Monday, September 8, 2008 in Theatre 11, an intimate black-box theatre. These auditions were conducted at the same time as those for *Eurydice*, a production that immediately preceded us on the season calendar. As actors were required to memorize character monologues for *Eurydice*, I

chose cold readings from the script in an effort to alleviate some of the pre-audition stress. Those auditioning were asked to choose two characters from *Cyrano de Bergerac* and prepare a short scene for each, based upon a pre-determined list of sides, or scenes. In order to keep the playing field level and to reduce speculation, all actors were seen individually and asked to audition using a "reader" seated in the house. Additionally, the actors were encouraged to make the space their own, inventing necessary business according to the needs of the character.

For the first round of auditions, my stage manager and I had originally allotted four hours to see the entire department, giving each individual approximately five minutes for his or her audition. Auditions would begin at four o'clock and conclude by eight. We soon found out that we had made a gross miscalculation and more than four hours would be needed. Sign-ups stretched across our scheduled break and into the ten o'clock hour. In spite of this, we finished a full hour ahead of time, having run the evening with precision and efficiency. A callback list was prepared and issued to the department via e-mail.

Due to the overlapping rehearsal periods of *Eurydice* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, casts could not be shared. Subsequently, my fellow director and I were advised to attend the callbacks for both shows in order to better understand the talent and chemistry needed for each production. Callbacks for *Cyrano de Bergerac* were held on Wednesday in the Mabee Theatre—a thrust theatre which allowed for more movement as the Jones Theatre was occupied. Early in the process I had been persuaded, for scheduling reasons, to hold a single round of callbacks only. It was a decision that I immediately regretted on

Wednesday night as I felt pinched between an extremely tight schedule, rehearsal conflicts for the musical, and needing to make the best decision possible.

The evening began with a fight audition for those being considered for the roles of Cyrano and the Viscount de Valvert. With an hour allotted for combat, the fight choreographer and I taught the actors a simple combat phrase which they were allowed to polish before performing a number of times with different partners. It was absolutely essential for the actors to be able to demonstrate hand and foot coordination, consistent characterization throughout the fight, and the ability to exchange dialogue while exchanging blows. For some, handling a sword was almost second nature—the extension of some innate skill—while for others it was an awkward attempt to manage unwieldy hands and feet. Nevertheless, almost all the actors displayed the potential for improvement and therefore kept themselves in contention.

The next phase of callbacks was for those individuals who indicated musical ability on their audition form. The story necessitates a minimum of two musicians, and I was interested to see those actors who could play instruments most closely associated with the time period. Approximately twenty actors from the department auditioned on a wide variety of musical instruments. Ultimately, two young ladies were chosen for the roles. The first could handle the mandolin as well as the guitar with impressive skill; the second was well-trained on the clarinet but could switch to either the soprano or alto recorder for the sake of the show. Interestingly enough, there was one additional casting decision unexpectedly based upon the musical audition. One actor chose to play a haunting elegy on his trumpet. Not only did his musical skill impress me, but his choice

of song immediately called to mind images of a battlefield. He won the role of Bertrand, the cadet who plays for the Gascons at Cyrano's request during act four.

The final phase of Wednesday night's callbacks was composed of cold readings from predetermined sides. In an effort to keep the auditions on schedule, I had spent a majority of the afternoon assigning the scenes and groups. Due to the time it took to retrieve actors from the hallway, have them read the scene, and occasionally feed them direction, we began to run grossly over time. To complicate matters, few actors were delivering solid, standout auditions for the lead roles of Cyrano, Christian, and Roxane. Few understood the style of the play. It was rare to see an actor take bold risks—the kind associated with a largeness of character essential to the success of the show. At the end of the night, I was deeply concerned for the future of the production.

After auditions concluded, I gathered with select faculty and the director of *Eurydice* to compare notes. Fortunately, the individuals I was considering for casting were not the same actors in the running for *Eurydice*, with one exception. My second choice for Roxane was a strong contender for the cast of *Eurydice*. I felt that other women available lacked an understanding of the energy, intelligence, and impulsiveness that characterized Roxane. Additionally, I was not convinced that I had a Christian yet either. I was therefore encouraged to hold another callback using various Roxanes and the two young men who were being considered for Christian. These were scheduled the following day at five o'clock in the afternoon and located to the musical theatre classroom for a closer examination of chemistry between characters.

Though both actors being considered for Christian possessed the youth, beauty, and energy necessary for the role, it became evident that one of the actors consistently

had better chemistry with the various Roxanes. Though his comic choices were at this time too small, the actor proved he could carry the darker, more emotional moments of the play convincingly and ultimately won the role. The part of Roxane, though, was more difficult to cast. Again, audition after audition seemed to reveal a misunderstanding of the character. Several women had presented Roxane as artificial, retiring, awkward, stiff, quirky, or overtly sexual. Roxane is the ðidealö woman, and though she does journey from impulsive adolescent to discerning adult, she must be intellectually sharp, boldly articulate, and alluringly chaste. This time, the actress being considered for casting in *Eurydice* gave the most consistent reading. After discussing the various actresses with my directing thesis advisor, we eventually concluded that my original choice would serve best, avoiding any potential casting conflict with *Eurydice*. Her audition in the first round of callbacks had proven she could command the stage with a wide range of emotion necessary for the role. Additionally, I knew the actress to be hardworking in rehearsal and extremely receptive to direction.

Casting the right actor in the role of Cyrano is, of course, fundamental to the success of the production. Traditionally, actors who play Cyrano are well into their forties or fifties. This practice, nonetheless, is historically inaccurate as Cyrano is written as a young twenty something. However, the life experience of older actors helps them grasp the depth and range of Cyrano's suffering. In auditions, there were few actors who seemed to understand the scale of the production, and most would choose to portray Cyrano realistically, focusing on his insecurities and romantic failings without indicating his bravado, chameleon adaptability, or acerbic wit. Conversely, there were also actors who primarily chose to depict Cyrano in a comedic vein, emphasizing his sarcasm and

playing for a laugh; these actors failed to capture the romantic side of Cyrano, his pain and his sacrifice. The actor who ultimately won the role displayed a well-rounded Cyrano, one who could bluster and intimidate his way through the Hôtel de Bourgogne as well as one who could smile through his pain and woo with complete sincerity. He was also known in the department for his consistent work ethic and attention to detail. The sheer enormity of the part would receive the attention it needed in the hands of this particular actor.

*Cyrano de Bergerac* also demands a strong supporting cast. The young man who won the role of De Guiche gave a clear indication that he understood the style of the play during auditions. He frequently captured and maintained my attention with his interesting choices and bold characterization. The actor inherently understood De Guiche's scheming and ambitious nature. The actor who won the role of Le Bret carried himself with a maturity and an ease which made him the ideal choice for Cyrano's best friend. As a testament to this young man's talent, he was able to fade into the background when the focus passed to Cyrano but commanded the stage when scolding or advising him. The role of Ragueneau carried a two-fold burden, not unlike that of Cyrano. The actor had to have a consummate sense of comedic timing but be able to bring an earnestness and pathos to the final moments of the play without seeming melodramatic or silly. I had complete confidence in the actor who was eventually cast as Ragueneau as he was immensely funny, fearlessly creative, and extremely versatile.

The characters of the Duenna and Lise provide lighthearted conflict to the plot; they help illuminate Cyrano's determination of purpose and nobility of character. For the Duenna, there were two actresses who gave strong auditions, each demonstrating a



natural aptitude for comedic timing. Both actresses made bold choices which stood apart from others who were vying for the role. Interestingly enough, these two actresses were worlds apart in their physicality of the character. This variety intrigued me and broadened my approach to the character. I would be happy with either woman, and in the end, the decision was made by the director of *Eurydice* who wished to cast one of them in her show. I chose the other, whose animated laughter and bold gestures served to energize a role that can easily get lost in the story. For the role of Lise, I was looking for an actress who could exude sexuality, restlessness, and rebelliousness. The woman I eventually cast read the part well-enough but won it on the merits of her facial and physical expression—the embodiment of a woman who has ceased to care and is looking for an adventure. The actress also has startling blue-green eyes which served the dialogue, as Cyrano remarks on her deceiving blue eyes.

Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, the captain of the Gascon cadets, needed to be an individual with a physically imposing presence as well as a commanding voice. The audience needs to believe that this is someone Cyrano respects and obeys. To fill this role I chose an actor whose striking appearance and amiable nature worked best for the Gascon leader. I knew the actor's vocal characterization would need direction during rehearsals: the actor's normal speaking voice is unexpectedly soft. Nevertheless, I knew he was capable of projecting with strength if prompted. Conversely, the character of the Viscount de Valvert needed to be played by an actor who could portray judgmental arrogance while emanating the foolishness of excessive foppery. A multi-talented actor who demonstrated his sword-fighting ability as well as a gift for comic timing was ultimately cast. He would also take on the role of the Friar and that of a Gascon cadet.

The role of Lignière was difficult to cast. Aside from being a rogue poet and drunk, the character has the challenge of presenting a majority of the exposition necessary to understand the given circumstances surrounding Christian, Roxane, De Guiche, Valvert, and Cyrano. Additionally, the character must have some likeable and redeeming qualities that befriend him to both Cyrano and Christian, warranting his protection at the Porte de Nesle. However, Lignière is a character which only appears officially in the first act of the play. In the end, I cast a relatively inexperienced actor who gave a solid audition, looked the part, and was known to be a hard worker. The challenges that faced him would be to bring a distinct likability to a drunken sot while clearly articulating critical information to the audience.

The rest of the cast was filled out utilizing a majority of the men from the department as well as some exceptionally talented women—almost all of whom would play multiple parts. The marquises were cast from young men who exemplified a commitment to ensemble work and displayed a maturing talent that would give weight to these roles. Another actor with great presence and energy was given the role of Jodelet, the theatre manager at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. He would also double as a poet and a Gascony cadet. Other young men cast as cadets would double as pages, poets, and cooks. The role of Mother Marguerite was awarded to an actress who instinctively exudes patience, kindness, and wisdom onstage. Her natural class and respectability led me to also use her as a lady for the first and third acts. For Sister Martha, I wanted a young woman who could portray a sweet naïveté protected by an uncompromising faith. I found it in an actress about whom I knew very little. Doubling as a shop girl in the first act, this actress proved to be very genuine on stage. The role of Sister Claire, a vain nun

with good intentions, was filled by a lovely actress who would also portray a member of the acting troupe at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The young woman cast as the food seller, a featured role in the first act, demonstrated a wonderfully shy admiration for Cyrano that was touching and sweet; she would also double as a poet and a nun. The role of the pickpocket was given to a woman, though traditionally cast as a man. I felt the character presented an opportunity to briefly feature another actress in a play dominated by male characters. The actress would also play a cook and a nun. Other women were added to fill out the ensemble in roles of an actress/poet and of a lady/nun.

The role of Montfleury was initially and intentionally omitted from the original cast list, as discussions with faculty had left the role up for consideration. Montfleury is a small role but a gigantic character featured in the first act. There were no men in the department whose physical appearance matched that of the notoriously fat actor. I had found an actor whose voice I felt conveyed the arrogance and salaciousness associated with Montfleury, though he was not at all obese. With approval, he was cast and the list updated. Within a few weeks, though, this actor was removed from the production due to an academic issue. I was forced to explore my options: cast a design major, use a faculty member, or double cast another actor already in the play. I was dissuaded from the first two options, so I elected to ask the actor playing Carbon de Castel-Jaloux to assume the role. He was more than happy to do so, though it meant that we would have to take extra care to disguise his appearance and differentiate between the two roles.

The most worrisome issue concerning casting surfaced a few weeks later as we approached the beginning of rehearsal. Faculty advisors came to me and requested that I seriously consider recasting a major role in the play due to scholastic issues of which I

was not permitted to know the details. I spoke privately with the individual involved about this possibility, explaining the difficulty of the situation. This student assured me that the situation would be rectified in a timely fashion. The ultimate decision, nevertheless, would be a faculty consideration; it was completely out of my hands. There were precious few options for me at this point. My second choice for the role was well into rehearsals for the other show and no longer a viable alternative for *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Though the department has no small measure of talent, none had captured the part as closely as my first two choices. Nevertheless, I had to be ready for a casting change and began to prepare myself for the extra work this would entail. Ultimately, the faculty graciously permitted the individual's participation in the play. Casting was now complete.

### *Script Adaptation and Editing*

From the beginning of the selection process, I knew that I wished to work with a public domain script. There were several reasons for this decision. First, I wanted to make sure that as much money as possible was channeled into the production for costume, prop, and set needs. Using a script in the public domain meant that there were no royalties to pay, and we could print and copy the play using the university's central duplicating facility, thus saving money. Additionally, I knew that I wanted to cut the script down from its original length. Five well-developed acts can result in a production that exceeds three hours in performance. Few contemporary audiences have the patience for such a lengthy presentation. It was important to pare the script down in respect of their time and to focus the storyline for better comprehension.

The version I chose was an early translation by Gladys Thomas and Mary Guillemard. Thomas was Rostand's sister-in-law, and Rostand had helped oversee the work which was done in Elizabethan-styled verse. Inevitably, there are always phrases and rhythms that are lost in translation, though I felt that this version would be truest to the original French. During auditions, however, it became apparent that the language did not flow as easily as it should. The script was rather dated, and the effort it took to enunciate the formal language worked against the action of the story. Instead of selecting another script, I chose to dig into the verse myself and see how it could be updated using modern contractions and contemporary sentence structure. With a faculty member acting as a dramaturgical advisor through this careful process, I revised the script three times, often looking at examples and footnotes in other translations for help with difficult passages.

In addition to updating the translation, I also edited the script to concentrate the storyline and shorten the performance length. My goal was to have a performance that clocked in at approximately two hours and twenty minutes. To achieve this, I read and reread the script to determine which lines carried exposition, developed or revealed character, forwarded the plot, or were traditionally associated with the story of Cyrano; anything that failed to meet those prerequisites was usually cut. Though Cyrano is celebrated for his legendary tirades, even some of these were pared down, especially when his analogous illustrations proved too antiquated or foreign for a contemporary audience. The end result was a production that ran at about two hours and fifteen minutes with a fifteen minute intermission between the third and fourth acts.

### *Fight Choreography*

One essential element of *Cyrano de Bergerac* that cannot be regarded lightly is the stage combat instrumental in defining the character of Cyrano; he is the consummate swordsman. The actor who portrays the title character bears the responsibility of convincingly representing a man famed for his dueling prowess, an exciting albeit intimidating condition for any undergraduate student. Likewise, the director needs to understand the vocabulary and history associated with rapier fights. To this end, I had attended a semester-long stage combat class during my first year as a graduate student and looked forward to implementing what I had learned. In auditions, the training enabled me to participate with the actors as well as look with a discerning eye at the various skill levels. From these men were cast the roles of Cyrano and the Viscount de Valvert, as well as the Marquis de Cuigy and the Marquis de Brissaille—two gentlemen who duel to pass the time during the opening moments of the play.

As I was determining specifics of the rehearsal calendar, the fight choreographer requested that certain blocks of time be reserved solely to create, practice, and maintain the fights that were to be included in act one. As a result, our first week of rehearsal was designated for stage combat basics and beginning choreography. The plan was to teach rudimentary attacks and parries along with basic foot work. Out of these essential elements, a more complex and daring fight would be composed, which would then be practiced routinely over the following weeks during designated fight calls.

Fight rehearsals began on Tuesday, October 14, 2008. This first week of practice was largely informal as we only met twice (Tuesday and Wednesday), working for three hours each night. As mentioned, the rehearsals started with simple attacks, parries, and

steps associated with basic rapier combat. The actual staging and choreography of the fights took several weeks to develop and solidify. It was a very organic process developing out of the ensemble work of the actors, the ideas and experimentation of the fight choreographer as well as my own vision for the fight—where it should travel and what story it should tell.

The marquises choreographed three independent phrases chiefly on their own. These phrases could be manipulated to fit the timing and staging of the larger scene developing around it. However, it would be a few weeks before the first act was blocked and smooth enough to determine which of the choreographed elements worked within the dialogue and staging. Eventually, other actors were incorporated into the action of their fight as obstacles and distractions.

The signature fight of the play, the duel between Cyrano and Valvert, was a dynamic combat designed to emphasize Cyrano's mastery of both the sword and the spoken word. The attacks, thrusts, parries, and evades had to support the text, which Cyrano delivers over the action. This was no easy task; repeatedly an idea would be choreographed and practiced only to be scrapped at a later point due to safety concerns, textual timing problems, staging issues, character choices, or simple inspiration and experimentation. It was a constantly evolving fight—a process which needed to be solidified sooner than it was. Sometimes the changes made would affect the blocking of the spectators, and I found myself restaging their maneuverings often. The primary problem with the fight is that we all felt it was not escalating towards a climax. To solve this, we raised the stakes by having Valvert take a dagger from a soldier, thereby tipping the odds in his favor. It was now a rapier-dagger fight, one easily won by Cyrano once

Valvert let his passions get the best of him. Another problem was the overall length of the fight, as my fight choreographer felt that there was just too much happening. Phrases were then edited from the fight. As a result of frequent additions and edits, it became difficult for the actors to consistently remember the fight. With a week left before technical rehearsals, I requested that no more changes be made as the actors needed time with a finished fight. Once we began dress rehearsals and performances, the stage manager set aside fifteen minutes prior to the opening of the house for fight call where the actors would mark the fight at half tempo before running it at performance speed.

### *Rehearsals and Acting Strategies*

With an epic production such as *Cyrano de Bergerac*, it is of paramount importance to use rehearsal time wisely. The director and stage manager must approximate and anticipate the time necessary to accomplish a myriad of tasks— all vital to the overall success of the show. The responsibilities are manifold. Directors collaborate with the actors on characterization, helping them explore moments of various emotional intensities, establish relationships, and reveal conflict. Time must be spent learning and incorporating fight combat as well as helping actors to understand period appropriate posture and gestures. Additionally, the director works to ensure audience comprehension through visual staging and by monitoring aural aspects such as actor diction. Finally, the director must help actors become acclimated to historical costuming— including the limitations or dangers inherent in confining clothing and loosely draped accessories such as capes, mantles, and sword hangers. These various responsibilities and their success in production, though shared with the ensemble, largely rest on the shoulders of the director.



Before rehearsals begin, directors must understand the production style of the play. An arsenal of acting strategies must also be at the director's disposal prior to beginning work with the cast. These tactics provide a way into the story for the actors, a foundation upon which to build their character, and an opportunity to discover successful techniques for exploration. The challenge of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, however, is that it eludes straightforward classification in terms of an acting style. Because of the play's focus on rich, poetic language and because of the size and scope of the story itself, I chose to approach *Cyrano de Bergerac* as if it were a Shakespearean piece. It was important to me that the acting be rooted in emotional truth but large enough to fill the space and carry the weight of the plot and such an iconic title character.

In rehearsals, I had planned to start with exploring the given circumstances of the characters, noting the effects of previous action of the play. Spending time with the text was essential. Through the dialogue, we examined what a character's decisions revealed about their desires, fears, and moral stance. Exchanging ideas with the actors, in an attempt to draw out their unique insight of the characters, was vitally important. These conversations would, as necessary, be supplemented with appropriate scholarship and academic detail to help flesh out the roles. Using improvisational techniques, I even asked certain actors to put down their scripts and recreate moments from their past in an effort to build a history between characters. By combining these simple strategies, I hoped actors would make confident and informed choices about the characters they were playing.

While temporarily setting aside the script may help embolden an actor's choices, the text of a play such as *Cyrano de Bergerac* demands careful attention. In our

exploration of the content and imagery, I encouraged actors to underline and emphasize operative words. Operative words are important descriptors, strong verbs, and significant nouns which contribute to both the meaning of the line and the poetry of the work. Actors were asked to focus on the implications of a line, of a silence, or of a decision to determine the motivations and biases of their characters. Examining operative words contributed to those discoveries.

One strategy I employed to help actors actualize the story was visual framing. Visual framing creates pictures on stage that serve to underscore the action and emphasize the dialogue. This was particularly useful in helping actors command focus when necessary. Actors were directed to stand on furniture, climb and sit on set pieces, push downstage, pull focus with costumes and props, or simply cheat out to help them draw attention to crucial or poignant narrative details. These actions are most effective when scripts are out of hand, and an actor can concentrate on the relationships and conflicts he is communicating simply by his proximity to another character.

Finally, I knew there would come a time when actors would need to confidently embrace the size and scope of the show with an acting style that was energetic, commanding, and capable of supporting the strong emotion felt throughout the play. They would need to be encouraged to explore their characters through strong physicality, bold facial expression, and full-bodied voices. There is no single strategy for exploring such an acting style. As Mandy Rees and John Staniunas report in their book *Between the Director and Actor*, "establishing a powerful presence on stage is a somewhat elusive task" (82). Using their suggestions, I had actors identify their objectives in a scene and focus on playing the action. It was important that characters command the

stage when the story demanded it, and the actors were asked to raise the stakes and occasionally overplay the moment in order to break free of small, intimate habits.

My work began with the actor playing Cyrano. Shortly after casting, the actor requested a copy of the script. The burden of so many lines is exceptionally daunting, and he was right to want to begin as soon as possible. Due to the numerous revisions, though, I asked him to wait until I had received approval for each act before passing them along. Once he received the acts, he immediately began memorizing. The actor's dedication to the role was impressive and reassuring. As we neared the start date for rehearsals, the actor and I agreed to meet once a week outside of practice to discuss and work problem areas. Depending on that week's specific need, we would work lines, examine inflection, discuss operative words, do vocal exercises, or play with subtext and delivery. Sometimes we would just talk about the given circumstances of Cyrano in order to help the actor get to the heart of the character. His infallible work ethic was a great example for the rest of the cast.

To prepare the show for performance, there would be six weeks of official rehearsal. This time did not include the two days devoted to fight choreography. Our first formal rehearsal took place on Monday, October 20, 2008. After a thirty-minute fight call, the entire cast was assembled for a comprehensive read-through of the play. During this rehearsal, lines were assigned to various ensemble actors who handled generic characters such as cadets, cooks, or poets. As we read through the script, I quickly noted a major problem I had not seriously anticipated: the mispronunciation of French words, titles, and names. Within a few days, the stage manager and I produced a phonetic pronunciation chart for each name, location, or title used in its original French.

This sheet was then posted on the callboard and e-mailed out to the cast. For some actors, the list was all they needed to make the appropriate changes. Others, however, struggled with the unfamiliar words and had to listen to corrections and repeat them often for mastery.

In the days that followed, rehearsals were strategically organized to start small, focusing primarily on the principal actors, their characters' relationships, and their blocking. Selected duets that revealed insecurities, established loyalties, or developed conflicts were repeatedly explored. Focus was also given to the unique dynamic of the Cyrano-Roxane-Christian triangle. We started with a foundation of emotional truth, a realistic examination of the motivation behind expression. We studied the given circumstances and previous action of the play in an attempt to establish believable characters. Using improvisation, I had the actors playing Cyrano and Roxane recreate moments from their youth that are echoed in the second act. Additionally, I had the actors playing Christian and Roxane improvise their very first encounter and subsequent attraction to help build their back story.

Acts three and five were the first to be blocked due to their intimate natures and limited character involvement. These acts, in their initial stages, came together rather quickly. For the ensemble acts— one, two, and four— a minimum of two days each was spent exploring the space and staging the crowd scenes. Act one was the first priority in order to establish safe boundaries for the sword fights and to get them into routine practice. The fourth act followed, as we would be dealing with guns, pikes, and swords on top of the already frenetic action. Due to space issues and calendar conflicts, we were actually in the third week of production before we were able to block the second act,

which was great fun to explore due to the camaraderie of the cadets and the inherent humor of the situation.

Typically, after blocking an act, time would be allotted to run it so as to set the movement in the actors' memory. Then particular problem areas were worked, restaged, or further explored in an effort to deepen the actors' understanding of the characters or to help them find solutions for staging or vocal issues. I continually pushed all the actors to play their action, an acting technique that focuses on strong verb choice and related movement. This was especially useful for the actor portraying Le Bret as he would often choose to retreat when he should be actively rebuking, defending, or protecting Cyrano. With some of the actors, I would also briefly discuss their character's objective in a particular scene. What did the character want? How was he or she going about getting it? Was he or she hiding anything?

At the end of the third week of rehearsals, actors set their scripts aside and began to explore their characters from memory. Directors usually expect these practices to be bumpy—the few steps back necessary before finding a consistent rhythm and beginning true exploration of the characters; our production was no exception. I found, however, that finding a solid rhythm with such a large cast was elusive at best. There were many reasons for this problem. First we were dealing with issues out of my control such as actor illness, irresponsibility, and family conflicts. Within a span of one week, several major players missed entire rehearsals. Christian missed a rehearsal due to food poisoning, Le Bret was forced to schedule emergency dental work, De Guiche slept through two hours of rehearsal, and Ragueneau battled mononucleosis which sidelined him for several days. With repeated absences such as these, it becomes extremely

difficult to consistently run through the material. Additionally, we often found ourselves rehearsing in different spaces due to university scheduled events surrounding homecoming. I found the only way to wade through such rough seas was to be extremely flexible and understanding.

The next step in the rehearsal process was to help actors extend their performance beyond realism. The cast was encouraged to explore the stage physically and fill the space vocally. With scripts out of hand, actors adopted historically appropriate postures, gestures, and mannerisms which were incorporated into the action. The consistent use of rehearsal boots, swords, corsets, skirts, capes, and canes helped the actors to respond organically. These costume elements helped the ensemble change the way characters walked, stood, and even breathed. Gentlemen were given lessons in bowing; ladies were taught how to curtsy. The addition of swords also helped raise the energy of the men portraying cadets. The fight choreographer instructed the actors on how to handle the weapons, even while they were at rest. They now had to be constantly vigilant regarding their proximity to another actor in order to avoid getting tangled up.

I had assumed that once actors were free of their scripts they would begin to bravely explore bolder choices traditionally associated with the play. Though the rehearsal costumes and accessories had helped, a majority of the performers still did not understand the acting style necessary for the success of the production. There were exceptions; a handful of actors instinctively realized the energy, volume, and largeness of character needed to support the story. Night after night, however, the three principles seemed hesitant to step outside their comfort zones and explore a melodramatic approach or presentational period style. As simple as it sounds, I found myself constantly

reminding them to be bolder, louder, and more energetic. At times these encouragements worked, but eventually the actors would revert to intimate expressions and gesture.

For the actor playing Cyrano, the breakthrough came when we began to explore the character vocally. Textually, we examined operative words, iconic speeches, and key lines that helped lift Cyrano to a heroic plain. With the help of a graduate faculty member, the actor began to utilize the vocal exercises of Arthur Lessac, a renowned vocal coach who developed a system for verbal dynamics. This was not something new to the actor, as he had been introduced to it a few years before. The results were instantaneous; overnight the actor had found the boldness, the strength, and the *panache* that characterizes the title character simply by extending his vocal range. Strategically, this is considered mask work, finding the character from the outside in. His vocal work, along with the application of the nose (another mask), mustache, goatee, costume, and sword freed the actor from his realistic binds. The ensuing vocal, physical and facial expression commanded the audience's attention night after night in performance.

The actress playing Roxane began to understand the style of the play when I likened it to a musical. These were terms the actress understood as she was well-versed in musical theatre. Once we began to draw parallels to the energy, projection, and expression that carries musical theatre, the actress began to explore the character in those terms. She also began to play with the age of Roxane; the character starts as an impetuous adolescent at the beginning of the play but ends as an introspective and mature woman. Slowly but surely Roxane began to take shape. In performance, I felt the actress skillfully and consistently demonstrated the arc of the character, delivering a convincing portrait of an infatuated girl who gradually transforms into a woman of principle.

Christian was discovered towards the end of the process. The actor had long understood the insecurities that wracked the character and played the dramatic moments well. His struggle came in searching for the comedic stupidity that confounds Christian's romantic exploits. To his credit, the actor steadfastly dedicated himself to getting the part right, but his instincts were just too small. Eventually I found that side coaching, constant reminders, and one-on-one discussions with the actor slowly freed him from his realistic confines. Side coaching was especially effective during the third act. I stood in the front row of the house and interjected direction and encouragements as necessary. The end result was truly hysterical, especially as the actor playing Christian tried to understand and rearticulate Cyrano's promptings during the balcony scene.

Stylistic problems were not the only challenge associated with the rehearsal process. With a large cast, the ensemble becomes a collective that is easily swayed by certain individuals. One of the greatest challenges I faced as a director was how to redirect supporting actors who stole focus, whether deliberately or unconsciously, at inopportune times. I handled this several different ways. Initially, I generally addressed the cast during notes, asking them to be sensitive to the action and to make sure that they were giving attention to the appropriate characters. This failed to solve the problem, so I began pulling actors aside one at a time and offer suggestions for action that was less obtrusive. To their credit, several of the actors began to understand the complexity of the situation and offered to disappear offstage when possible or turn their backs on the action. There was, however, one actor who continued to draw focus by intentionally placing himself in the center of a dramatic moment, smiling during a serious scene and creating a comic scenario for his character when he needed to fade into the background.



In the end, the only way I could find to correct the problem was to call him out on it as soon as the problem began.

As we approached technical rehearsals, the energy of the cast began to wane. I understood that continuing to work night after night without audience interaction and to conclude every evening with directorial criticism can be difficult and demoralizing for a cast. My generalized encouragements had grown ineffective; it was time to switch gears. I began releasing the actors as soon as a run-through was complete. Notes would then be typed up and sent to individuals or groups as necessary through e-mail. But, in contrast to the constructive comments they continued to receive, I made sure that each correspondence began with specific, personal praise to help encourage the actors in their final few rehearsals.

### *Set Transitions*

During the design process, the set designer, technical director, and I had agreed to utilize the cast as the run crew for the set changes. Because of this decision it was essential to devote at least one entire rehearsal to the multiple scenic transitions, associated traffic flow, and necessary backstage organization. The work was delayed until Tuesday, November 18<sup>th</sup> the night just prior to faculty preview and the beginning of technical rehearsals. The reason the rehearsal was scheduled so late in the process was due to the simultaneous production demands of two separate shows; the scene shop was working overtime just to have set pieces completed by opening night. For the transition rehearsal, it was necessary to have a majority of those pieces in working condition. Every set piece was accounted for, with the exception of the pit stairs and platform from the first act; the rest were in various stages of completion.

To help organize our time, the stage manager had created a chart assigning available cast members to specific scenic elements, furniture, or properties. These transitions, by all accounts, were actually designed and directed by the stage manager. I found it hard to know when to interject. I knew that I had wanted a tightly orchestrated change that was smooth, artistic, and visually interesting. What it became, though, was an exercise in efficiency lacking artistic merit. The stage manager and I had agreed that the set changes needed to be completed in as short a time as the scenic elements would allow. To accomplish this, however, she was pressing the actors to work harder and faster without any attention given to how it looked on stage. Occasionally I was able to offer an idea here or there as to how the process might present itself visually for the audience, but we ran out of time before I could initiate any artistic solution. In the end, I had to settle for what the cast could organically discover in subsequent rehearsals without changing the traffic patterns established by the stage manager.

### *Technical and Dress Rehearsals*

On the afternoon of Wednesday, November 19, 2008, I met with the sound designer, lighting designer, and stage manager for paper tech. A paper tech is a meeting to determine when light and sound cues are called by the stage manager in the script. The designers bring in their respective cue sheets and methodically go through the script instructing the stage manager where a cue should be called, referencing the director if a moment is unclear. Although two hours were allotted for the meeting, we found that this was not enough time and a follow-up meeting between the stage manager and the lighting designer was scheduled for the next day.

Dry techs, technical rehearsals held without actors, are necessary to set sound levels, adjust cue fade times, and fine-tune the lighting design for specific looks. During these rehearsals, the stage manager practices calling cues to acclimate board operators, spotlight operators, and backstage crews to their responsibilities. Dry techs were scheduled for Thursday and Friday afternoon, while the evenings were reserved for routine acting rehearsal. Our dry tech time was cut short both days at the request of the technical director who required more time on stage and in the shop to finish up major set pieces. The needs of the scenic department were critical, so we had little option but to comply. We understood the delay would ultimately affect the success of full techs scheduled for the weekend.

On Saturday, technical rehearsals were scheduled to begin in earnest. From one o'clock in the afternoon until the actors were called at three, the design staff and I managed to squeeze in another dry tech. Crews and staff had been working since early morning to solve various lighting and scenic issues that had presented themselves over the past few days, including problems with the fog machine and wiring the chandeliers for the first act. Once the actors arrived, we worked cue to cue through the first three acts before rehearsal concluded at eleven o'clock. On Sunday, we returned and finished acts four and five before running the show.

When running a show with full tech, there is a change in the acting that is immediately palpable. Actors rise to the occasion, putting the finishing touches on their characters as lights, set pieces, and sound help establish the mood. Opening a show becomes an immediate reality instead of a far-off probability. Additionally, the director slowly relinquishes control of the play, allowing the stage manager to step up and assume

responsibility for the performance. I was, however, always available to clarify any ambiguous situation or to give a stamp of approval for a well-executed cue.

Dress rehearsals began on the Monday prior to Thanksgiving. On the first night, there were still several costume items missing and a myriad of issues relating to how the costumes fit, absent accessories, or unfinished hemlines. The costume shop had suffered the same fate as the scenic shop: they were burdened with designing, constructing, and maintaining two shows almost simultaneously. As there was no time for a dress parade, this was the first chance we had to see the costumes together on stage; some items were perfect, others still needed attention. Understandably, the cast goes through a period of adjustment, especially with period costumes. It affects the rhythm of play as the focus of the actors naturally shifts away from the lines and action to the hems, ties, and hats that present new obstacles to the performance. Actors must have time to learn their costumes and be able to use them in service of the characters. There are also costume changes to perfect as well as slight modifications in blocking and business to anticipate. For example, the men in the cast could not predict how the wide brim of the hats would affect the lighting of their faces. Business had to be created, allowing them to take off their hats and use them as props, thereby exposing their faces to the light.

The second dress rehearsal, held Tuesday, was a solid run. Actors were adjusting to the new additions, and both scenic and costume elements were nearing completion. Though still a week from opening, our rehearsal time was short. We would lose five days of rehearsal to the Thanksgiving holiday. This was a major concern of mine. A successful run hinges on the rhythm established between actors, costume changes, and technical elements during dress rehearsals. To suddenly drop the work and go on holiday

disrupts any production, especially one still struggling to get on its feet. Conversely, the time off can also rejuvenate a cast, resulting in a fresh performance upon their return. At this point, the worries outweighed the benefits. I had lobbied, without success, to move the second dress rehearsal to the Sunday after Thanksgiving. The denial meant we would only have one supported run after the break prior to opening Tuesday, December 2.

Actors were called back on Sunday, November 30 for a pick-up run— an unsupported, acting rehearsal. First, the actors reviewed the set transitions to ensure that they remembered their assignments and traffic patterns. On the advice of a faculty member, I then allowed the cast to do a speed-through/fun run. It was one last opportunity for the actors to explore their characters in a relaxed and safe environment. After breaking for dinner, the actors returned for a serious run-through that was focused and energized.

The final dress rehearsal followed on Monday night. We ran the show with a designer-invited audience. It was a rough run. The re-addition of the costumes and technical elements proved distracting and disturbed the rhythm of both cast and crew. For me, it was a confirmation of my concerns. Nevertheless, the show must go on, as the proverbial saying goes, and opening night loomed before us.

### *Performance*

*Cyrano de Bergerac* opened on Tuesday, December 2, 2008, and ran for six performances. My fears of a rocky start were quickly put to rest. Opening night was a resounding success, complete with an enthusiastic audience who rewarded the actors with a standing ovation. With each subsequent performance actors relaxed into their roles and found a rhythm that was consistently strong— bravely managing unpredictable technical

troubles that would occasionally surface. The worst of these dilemmas happened during the last performance. The orchestra pit malfunctioned during the first scene change prior to the second act, freezing in its lowered position. Fortunately, we had planned for and rehearsed a "worst-case scenario" in advance, and the actors adjusted accordingly. The furniture for the second act was shifted to the emergency spike marks upstage of the proscenium. The actors who played Cyrano, De Guiche, and Ragueneau all found ways to incorporate the pit during the act, while the assistant stage managers worked to solve the problem behind the scenes. The pit was then raised during the next set transition.

Generally, I chose to watch the performances from the back of the house; as a nervous participant, I found it easier to watch with a critical eye away from the paying public. I am not a director who can easily set aside her duties. Instinctively I continue to watch for problems even though I no longer have the opportunity to fix them. Nevertheless, my job was complete, and it was time to relinquish control and take pleasure in the results. I gradually allowed myself to enjoy the reactions of the audience, which, though different from night to night, were overwhelmingly positive.

Due in part to its popularity in the theatrical canon, the play was well attended with the last four shows selling out completely. No performance had less than three hundred people in attendance. During the formal and impromptu talkbacks that followed select performances, audience members were allowed to interact with the cast, asking questions that ranged from the nose to the rehearsal process; most participants were sincerely complimentary of the final product. Additionally, I received several e-mails from individuals who praised the overall professionalism of the production though the show received a mixed review from the local critic. Although this review was

disheartening, it gave me pause to reflect on the problems with the production.

Nevertheless, I was encouraged night after night by the response of the audience. In the end, every performance received a standing ovation, a fitting tribute recognizing the hard work of the production staff and the actors.

### *Conclusion*

Trying to creatively articulate my vision for Rostand's masterpiece was a two-fold responsibility. The first, after casting, was to communicate, and motivate the actors to perform with emotional truth a style that supports the play's epic content. The second was to ensure that all the elements worked together in a way that captured the audience's attention and sustained it through five acts. No production is ever perfect, and ours was no exception. However, educational theatre is meant to be a place where students can learn and grow; deliberate and detailed reflection on the process can only benefit the artist and improve future artistic endeavors.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Reflection

#### *Introduction*

As a director, I find it extremely difficult to be completely objective about my own work. Emotionally and intellectually, I am caught up in the story, the script, the process, the relationships, and the product. I work towards a unique vision and concept for the play, keeping in mind that theatre is a collaborative art: all actors, designers, stage managers, and crews are essential to the success of the process and the product. To be able to step back and impartially evaluate the final result is difficult but vital to the growth of any artist. Therefore, in this chapter I will work to identify specific deficiencies in the production and pose practical solutions to these problems.

#### *Design*

The primary function of the design elements in any production is to serve as visual or aural support to the play, guided by the director's concept. They should enhance the action of a play without detracting from the narrative or distracting the audience. As a director, I was careful to articulate a clearly definable concept and supply visuals to reinforce ongoing dialogues with designers. The result was a concept focused on the natural, elemental, aged, and weathered aspects often found in Romantic art. The size, history, and ideals behind *Cyrano de Bergerac* demand a production style that helps pull the spectator into a tangible seventeenth-century world of balconies, bakeries, and battlefields.



Due to the fact that two shows were being mounted simultaneously, the set for *Cyrano de Bergerac* was not completely finished until the final dress rehearsal. Faculty and staff were left with the unenviable job of completing the pieces over the Thanksgiving holiday. Unfortunately, there were details that were never completed to my satisfaction. For example, the paint, while textured, was still too saturated. It gave the appearance of newness, cleanliness, and, on some pieces, a two-dimensionality that was reminiscent of fairy-tale illustrations; it was the sublime without the grotesque. However, due to the production calendar, there was precious little to be done to rectify the situation.

Solutions to such problems do not present themselves easily. My set designer and I had spent many hours collaborating in front of a computer to make sure that the colors we chose were reminiscent of the visual research I had presented to him. In those early stages, I asked for numerous changes to be made in order to bring his original color scheme in line with a more natural look. When transferred to the scale model, the results appeared weathered and organic. Somewhere between the design presentation and opening night, that detail was lost. It is possible that the colors and intensities chosen for the lighting design washed out the texture that was present. If this was the problem, then a possible solution would be to revisit the lighting design and make recommendations for adjustments. Another possibility was that the paint crew, used to working in close proximity to the set piece, failed to step back far enough to note how the details were reading from the house. Here, of course, the solution would be to encourage the paint crew to evaluate their work at the end of each day from the back of the house under sufficient light and make necessary changes.

Another problem with the set that I did not anticipate was the stark geometry of the scenic pieces. This was not the designer's first intention. Unfortunately, budgetary constraints mandated that we revise our original set design which contained more arches and angular break-ups. For example, the two columns used to mark the entrance to Clomire's house in act three were originally designed as a stone archway. The arch was cut and the stock-columns, already used in act one, were substituted. Moreover, an angular and dramatic pile of battlefield debris was struck from the design of act four. This would have helped break-up the stark emptiness of the stage at the Siege of Arras. Unfortunately, these edits were made late in the process after designs were finalized. In an attempt to keep the production on schedule, the changes made by the set designer, which I approved, had to be easily accomplished within the production timetable.

Another victim of budgetary constraints was the patisserie scenic drop from the second act. It was ultimately fabricated from stock platforms, giving it the final rectangular silhouette that would dominate the stage picture. Steps were taken to ensure that an arch was painted on the backdrop as well as other natural elements such as smoke damage, flour dust, and ovens in perspective. However, crisp geometric elements in the stage picture worked against the painted architecture. These included bars that ran up and down the drop as well as several squares and circles. The original intention of these geometric shapes was to hold various baked goods, suggest ventilation, and represent stove pipes. The result, though, was a mixed bag of shapes that detracted from the bakery's overall appeal; it looked cartoonish. The backdrop was one of the first items completed for the *Cyrano de Bergerac* build. This means that, apart from the demands of other set pieces, it is conceivable that these concerns could have been addressed and

rectified. As I was focused on the actors and their blocking within the bakery, I paid little attention to the backdrop in rehearsal. In the future, I need to step outside the details and allow myself to take in the entire stage picture, carefully noting whether or not all aspects of a scene are working in support of characters and story.

In terms of costumes, there were only a few items that, upon reflection, failed to meet my original expectations based upon the designs. One of these was Cyrano's cape. The fabric chosen was stiff, thick material that hung clumsily from the actor's body. I had no input on the selection of the fabric, and the piece was completed before I had time to comment on the inflexibility of the material; the cape did not flow. The costume designer was so enthusiastic about the piece that I could not find it in my heart to criticize it. Time was precious, however, and the crew was short-staffed; I had to choose my battles carefully and decided to let this one slide. My decision to accept the constructed cape is one I regret. If Cyrano is to be the ideal, swashbuckling hero, then every aspect of his costume needs to be in service of that ideal. I should have made it a priority to stop by the costume shop daily to check in and see what progress was being made. Had I discovered the fabric earlier, I believe I could have redirected its design into something that was more actor-friendly.

The nuns' habits were the last of the fabricated costumes to be completed, the responsibility of an undergraduate student designer. Evidently rushed for time, the end result was a series of mismatched hems and veils that looked hastily thrown together rather than the precision fabrication one would expect from cloistered women. During dress rehearsals, I insisted that the hems be lengthened but, in order to do so, strips of fabric had to be added to the shift-like dresses. The red crosses, attached to the front of

their tabards, were also problematic, as I felt they resembled red felt and looked anachronistic. Since the Sisters of the Holy Cross only appear in the fifth act, it is easy to make them a low priority. This is a mistake, as the final impressions of the play can have the greatest impact on an audience. A solution to the problem would be to have all constructed elements take precedence over costumes pulled or modified from stock although certainly this timeline is debatable and, all things considered, at the discretion of the costume designer or crew head.

Finally, there were a few costumes pulled from stock that I felt drew unwanted focus as they did not match the natural color palette used predominantly throughout the design. First, a magenta colored doublet for one of the cadets was markedly different from the other Guards, who were primarily clothed in earth tones. The second was a dress which fit one of the ladies in the first act. Her costume was bright red and green; Christmas analogies circulated throughout the cast. I was open with the designer after dress rehearsal and conveyed my concern about the selected items. There was little to be done, however, as stock costumes were limited and there was no time to build suitable replacements. In situations where time and money have run out, there is little to be done except to make your concerns known. Neither costume was altered.

### *Transitions*

My original concept for the set transitions was that major set pieces, guided by actors in a tightly choreographed pattern, would fluidly travel on and offstage as necessary. The idea was to efficiently execute the transition while maintaining the audience's interest through movement and music. The end result, of course, was a poor

representation of what I had imagined. Though not exactly chaotic, it lacked the refinement and timing I had desired.

There were many factors that contributed to the overall feeling of disorganization. First, the timetable for set construction meant that most major scenic pieces were not completed prior to our transition rehearsal. My focus on staging and acting as well as unexpected meetings with designers during the last weeks of construction distracted my attention from upcoming transition practice. I severely underestimated the organization and planning necessary to ensure a successful transition rehearsal. To that end, I had only allotted one rehearsal for set changes, when, in reality, I should have split the rehearsal over two nights allowing more time for practice, problems, and actor questions.

Nevertheless, several solutions or strategies could have been implemented to help make the transition rehearsal smoother and the outcome more polished. From the beginning, I should have clearly communicated with the stage manager that this was to be a part of the action and something I wanted to explore with the actors myself. Instead, the stage manager assumed that this was her responsibility and assigned set pieces to actors without my knowledge or consent. I do not fault her for her assertiveness, though I wish she had sought my approval prior to vocalizing her assignments in rehearsal. Additionally, while it would have been difficult to estimate the number of actors needed to move some of the larger pieces, I could have prepared for the transitions much further in advance. Utilizing a ground plan of the theatre, traffic patterns and storage spaces should have been drawn up and discussed openly with the stage manager, assistant stage managers, and actors prior to the transition rehearsal. Creatively, I could have found alternative ways to link the scenes together as well, such as utilizing ensemble characters

as little entracte entertainments while pieces were moved behind them. In the end, I should have proactively articulated my vision to the stage manager and done a better job anticipating the time and work involved.

### *Staging and Timing*

One of the primary responsibilities a director has to a production is effective staging. The blocking of the actors must be visually engaging as well as supportive of the story being told. Encouraging the actors to explore the space, incorporate levels, and vary their body positions are all tactics used in an attempt to capture and focus the audience's attention. Though I am often considered a very "visual" director, the blocking of *Cyrano de Bergerac* presented huge challenges that were difficult to overcome. For example, *Cyrano de Bergerac* is, at its heart, a play built upon language. The stage picture must reinforce what the characters say and not detract from it. This is difficult when you have a young cast who does not yet understand the importance of fading into the background, giving focus, or taking a bold risk when necessary. As a director, I had to learn to balance the inherent busyness of a large cast on stage with the individual dramatic speeches that needed aural and visual emphasis.

Critically speaking, the first act of the play proved the most problematic for me and for the audience. The first few pages of the act set the scene by having a variety of people enter the Hôtel de Bourgogne to see Baro's *La Clorise*. The problematic nature of this scene can first be linked to Rostand's writing, a concern that other productions have addressed in different ways. In 1897, at the premiere performance, Rostand was so concerned about the opening scene that he actually took to the stage dressed as a marquis to help direct the action from within (Lloyd 137). David Leveaux's Broadway

production as well as Gregory Boyd's at The Alley Theatre in Houston cut the beginning of the first act, choosing instead to start the play with the entrance of Christian and Lignière. I chose to retain the action, fascinated, ironically, by the "slice of life" Rostand had written. I felt that these few pages established the environmental circumstances of seventeenth-century Parisian theatres and set a precedent for important entrances that culminated with Cyrano's startling interruption of the play. In retrospect, I believe I should have let the wisdom of other productions help guide my decision.

There were several other factors, apart from Rostand's dialogue and action, which also contributed to the confusion of the scene. First, the scene designer and I did not anticipate how little floor space would be left after lowering the pit, building a faux stage, and bringing in the traveler center stage to serve as a backdrop for the platform. The remaining depth of the space was approximately one-third of the original. Additionally, the relative narrowness of our proscenium theatre crowds the action horizontally. In what is arguably the most congested act of the play, we had severely reduced the room in which to work.

Though the scenic designer and I had walked the space at the beginning of the design process, we had only focused on measuring out major set pieces such as the balcony and the bridge. During rehearsals for the first act, I had approximated where the platform, steps, and benches would sit as my stage manager did not tape out the space. I was completely unaware that this was one of her jobs and that the set pieces should have been marked out on the floor prior to blocking rehearsals. Had she followed through on her responsibility, it is quite possible that I would have realized the problem earlier in the

process. Then, the set designer and I could have moved the faux stage platform and traveler further upstage.

There were also problems with the timing and blocking of this first scene. More time should have been taken with the staging and introduction of various ensemble characters. Even if these characters do not figure prominently into the story, an audience still needs to feel that they have a grasp on who people are and what function they have in a scene. Though it is impossible to guess at how successful imagined solutions would be, I believe the scene should have begun with the actors and musicians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne preparing the space prior to opening the theatre. Then the patrons could have entered the theatre in accordance to the script, though I would hope to make better use of the stage to highlight social cliques, love interests, and related business.

Problems with the scene were first pointed out to me during faculty preview, the day before we entered dry techs. At this point, we were too late in the process to make any major revisions to the blocking as it could drastically affect the lighting design. Additionally, a majority of the faculty had differing opinions on how to solve the dilemma, and I was unsure which course of action to follow. Instinctually, I knew something was wrong early in the process after initially blocking the scene, but I could only narrow my concern to an issue with focus. In trying to solve the problem I asked actors to play with giving and taking focus, throwing away lines, and adjusting the staging as necessary. No satisfactory solution ever presented itself. In the end, I should have scrapped the work done on this segment and started from scratch.

Another act which proved problematic for the audience was the fourth act. The combination of necessary sound effects and scripted battle cries worked against the



dialogue surrounding Roxane's confession, Christian's death, and Cyrano's lie. With the cadets situated upstage against the barricade and facing the enemy, the logical choice is to move the momentous duet scenes downstage closer to the audience. In attempting to do so I encountered many problems. First, actors both upstage and downstage had a hard time hearing cue lines delivered on opposing sides of the stage. Instinctively, the principals reacted by positioning themselves further upstage near the proscenium line to better hear dialogue. The result was a vacuum of unused stage space down center. Though actors were repeatedly asked to move downstage, use their space, or cheat out towards the audience, few complied consistently. As a director I had failed to identify the problem soon enough; the actors were never able to confidently use the depth of the apron.

The addition of battle sound effects further exacerbated the problem. Oftentimes, actors would speak through loud sound effects or, conversely, be drowned out by them. Though the sound designer and I had carefully scripted where the cannon and musket fire would go, the company just did not have enough time to run, evaluate, adjust, and fix the cues. I made a hasty attempt to clarify the situation during technical rehearsals and found that actors had been delivering lines out of order, in part because those situated upstage could not hear the intimate downstage dialogue. In an attempt to solve the problem, I pulled the actor playing Carbon de Castel-Jaloux downstage, situating him between the cadets and the principals. Action was also added between Roxane and Ragueneau allowing Cyrano a moment alone with the dying Christian, without having to compete with the noise of the battle behind him.

The problems with act four should have been addressed sooner. I can only fault myself for failing to notice the actors' hesitation to pull downstage until it was already ingrained in their minds and too difficult to adjust. I believe that if I had encouraged the actors to use the apron earlier in the process, creating anchored areas that supported a variety of stage business, then the results would have been more audience friendly and romantically satisfying. Concerning sound, I should have spent more time clarifying, in my imagination, what the effects would sound like, where they occurred in the dialogue, and their length. Perhaps then we could have more effectively rehearsed reactions to the battle as well as the timing needed to set apart important lines.

### *Acting*

After working with such a large cast of characters, I was proud of the performance as a whole. A collaboration of this size demands a great deal of focus, patience, creativity, and risk from all those involved. My job was to channel the ensemble's artistic energy and originality into a cohesive heartrending story, reassuring the actors as they explored the murky waters of characterization and providing opportunities to risk and fail. To this end, I tried to give actors room to experiment and personalize their choices; I wanted to promote actor responsibility and ownership of their characters.

The amount of pressure associated with a role like Cyrano cannot be underestimated, and the actor tackled the iconic part with determination and a disciplined work ethic. His physical presence commanded the audience's attention while his voice boldly colored and articulated the numerous speeches and witty repartee. His performance was commendable, particularly for a young actor who does not have the life

experience necessary to support such a challenging role. Nevertheless, the actor needed approximately another week of rehearsals to be able to identify moments of intimacy where the character drops all pretense and relaxes into his surroundings. There needed to be more moments, especially around Le Bret, where Cyrano simply threw away lines or dismissed concerns without posturing. Additionally, the actor needed to take more time when the character displayed those rare instants of vulnerability. Where these raw moments should intermittently rise to the surface and linger during Cyrano's personal climaxes, they were often rushed as if to conceal the character's true feelings. As a director, it was my responsibility to make sure he understood the importance of these contrasting moments, which I needed to communicate better.

Another character I needed to spend more time with was Lignière. The amount of exposition carried by this seemingly nominal character is, by comparison, colossal; its importance cannot be underestimated. The actor playing the role of Lignière impressed me with his hard work ethic, positive attitude, and willingness to work outside of scheduled rehearsals. The challenges that faced this relatively inexperienced actor included the clear articulation of vital plot information while appearing drunk and eager to leave his surroundings. Suggestions I gave the actor, including playing his action, adding naughty insinuations, and watching his enunciation, were achieved with effort in a one-on-one setting. When our work was transferred into rehearsal with the rest of the cast, the actor was never able to recreate those moments we had worked on alone. In performance, therefore, moments were rushed and important dialogue was swallowed. Though I applaud the efforts of the young actor, in retrospect, I should not have given him a role which carried such responsibility.

Problems with the character of De Guiche, on the other hand, were entirely my fault. The actor, from the beginning, had instinctively understood the style of the play and took direction easily. The problem with the portrayal was the way I read the character and directed the actor. I saw De Guiche, at select times, as a comic foil to Cyrano. I believed his behavior should contrast the title character's noble and sacrificial attributes. When the faculty previewed the production, several were quick to correct my error. De Guiche needed to be a strong antagonist, every inch a credible threat to Cyrano's *panache*. I promptly articulated their observations to the actor who understood the implications. The problem was that there was not enough time to explore and fully develop an alternative characterization. It is very difficult for any actor to drop well-rehearsed moments in favor of something completely different, no matter the time allotted to make those changes. The actor valiantly attempted the change that, which, while not entirely successful, was at least a bold step in the right direction.

### *Self Analysis*

As a director, it is important for me to be able to identify my own strengths and weaknesses. As I articulated earlier, I find it extremely difficult to be objective about my own work. I realize, however, that my growth as an artist is dependent upon an honest and mature assessment of my own skill.

My greatest strength is the zeal with which I research a play. I find it exciting to dig through the historical detail that helps my understanding of the story and passionately share it with the design team and cast. For designers, this research can help expand their vision of the play as well as prevent misinterpretations of the script. Furthermore, these

academic elements serve the actors as a foundation upon which they may choose to build their characters, preventing anachronistic mistakes.

Additionally, I am able to visualize and clearly articulate my concept for production. As a result, I work easily with designers, able to communicate in terms they understand. The exchange of ideas and requests for modifications never seem to be a problem. With the designers for *Cyrano de Bergerac*, I was able to clearly articulate what worked and what did not without inhibiting their creativity. This resulted in a relaxed work environment where the artists were freed to imagine, design, adapt, and edit as necessary.

As a director, I also believe, with few exceptions, that I am consistently able to cast the right actors for the right parts. Before entering auditions, I have a clear idea of how a character moves, sounds, and interacts with others on the stage. Auditions, therefore, become a time where my attention is focused on the work brought into the space. I am able to identify not only those who consistently present the best artistic choices but those who have the potential to grow into a part.

My attention to and appreciation of talent seen during auditions evolves into a respect for the actor's process in rehearsal. I am sensitive to their moods, needs, and fears. I want them to confidently own their artistic choices, and I try to create an environment where they are free to explore, take risks, and fail in an effort to bring their character to life. I never impose a single-minded approach to characterization in rehearsals; rather, I am open to actor's suggestions and a variety of strategies for actor success.

Finally, one of my greatest strengths as a director is my ability to visually stage the story. The stage is my canvas; the actors, the set pieces, the costumes, and the lights are the palette with which I work. I am easily able to incorporate levels, stage depth, body position, and spatial variety to the stage picture. My goal is always to create an engaging view for the audience, one which serves to underscore the dialogue and to support the story.

In spite of these assets, there are many areas in which my work can grow and mature. For example, I believe I am still trying to find my place in the shifting dynamics of the director-actor relationship. I tend to place my actors on a pedestal and can easily be intimidated when they are quiet, moody, or unresponsive. I need to learn to push through these emotions and practice strategies that serve to reengage the individual.

I am also a director who struggles with positive reinforcement. Artists thrive in a safe environment, and I need to constantly keep this in mind for the benefit of the production. I have learned, through this experience, that encouragement is essential to the growth of an artist. Actors are willing to take more risks if they feel the outcome will be met with enthusiasm and appreciation for the attempt.

In terms of blocking, for this production in particular, I found that I tended to over-balance the stage picture. I need to, where applicable, explore the virtues of an unbalanced stage. Though instinctively I may be searching for a harmonious visual for the audience, I am slowly learning how powerful subtle, asymmetric changes in blocking are. They serve to heighten tension, create conflict, and illustrate dynamic relationships.

Additionally, I am learning that I should pull away from the details of a performance and take in the big picture. My tunnel-vision approach fails to see problems

in the greater arc of the story. This can be hugely detrimental to a production and therefore needs to be addressed with diligence. Admittedly, however, it is hard to approach the rehearsal process with fresh eyes in the middle of production. I honestly believe that if I scheduled more uninterrupted moments of downtime during the week, I would be able to free my imagination from production demands; the result would hopefully be a fresh approach to rehearsals and an ability to identify problems in a timely fashion.

Finally, one my greatest weaknesses as a director is my inability to articulate specific, successful acting strategies to my actors. In reflecting over the rehearsal process of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, I found it extremely difficult to verbalize my approach to the play. This included, unfortunately, a marked inability to coherently clarify the acting style necessary for the production. I lacked the vocabulary and the resources to effectively communicate the stylistic demands of the play to the actors. The result was, in essence, a collaborative venture without a unifying principle which ultimately led to artistic confusion and a sense of distrust between director and actor.

### *Panache*

Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* is an exciting piece of history. The characters and ideals Rostand envisioned provide a veritable playground for theatre artists to relive childhood fantasies. Above all it is the opportunity of a lifetime, replete with its own unique set of obstacles. To helm a play of this size, beloved of many and backed by years of celebrated productions, is intimidating even for the most experienced director. Though I was excited about the challenges ahead of me and delighted with

prospect of delving into Rostand's world, I also needed to embolden myself to face the daunting task set before me.

It takes courage to attempt ambitious art. There were certainly days when I felt a heavy responsibility that accompanies such a beloved work of the theatre. During those moments, I found inspiration in Cyrano's *panache* that certain *je ne sais quoi* that epitomizes the literary legend. Rostand, in his acceptance speech for the *Académie française*, attempted to clarify the term:

I would propose this definition: panache is the spirit of bravery. It is courage dominating the situation to the point of needing to find another word for it. . . . A delicate refusal to take oneself tragically, panache is then the modesty of heroism, like the smile with which one apologizes for being sublime. . . . A little frivolous perhaps, a bit theatrical certainly, panache is only a grace: but this grace that is so difficult to maintain in the face of death, this grace that assumes such force—this is the grace I wish for us. (qtd. in Baity 7)

Patience, grace, and a solid sense of humor helped me through the momentary troubles of the process, enabling me to learn important lessons about leadership and collaboration.

The challenges and the rewards have deepened my appreciation, not only for Rostand's work, but for my fellow artists as well. There is also a certain pride that accompanies *panache*, and I certainly feel its presence. It is not a vainglorious conceit of a job well done but an understanding of the value of the experience.



## APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

Production Photographs Featuring the Set Design



Fig. A.1. The Portal in the Jones Theatre



Fig. A.2. Act One



Fig. A.3. Act Two



Fig. A.4. Act Three



Fig. A.5. Act Four



Fig. A.6. Act Five

APPENDIX B

Production Photographs Featuring the Costume Design



Fig. B.1. Cyrano



Fig. B.2. Roxane's Dress for Act One and Act Three



Fig. B.3. Roxane's Dress for Act Two



Fig. B.4. Roxane's Dress for Act Five



Fig. B.5. Christian



Fig. B.6. Count de Guiche and the Marquises



Fig. B.7. Viscount de Valvert



Fig. B.8. Le Bret





Fig. B.9. Ragueneau



Fig. B.10. The Duenna



Fig. B.11. Lise and The Musketeer



Fig. B.12. Sister Martha

APPENDIX C

Production Photographs Featuring the Lighting Design



Fig. C.1. Act Two



Fig. C.2. Act Three



Fig. C.3. The Moon



Fig. C.4. Transition Silhouettes



Fig. C.5. Act Five Cloud Effect



Fig. C.6. Act Five Tight Focus

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