



Cyrano de Bergerac

Edmond Rostand

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'Tonight When I make my sweeping bow at heaven's gate, One thing I shall still possess, at any rate, Unscathed, something outlasting mortal flesh, And that is ...My panache.' The first English translation of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, in 1898, introduced the word *panache* into the English language. This single word summed up Rostand's rejection of the social realism which dominated late nineteenth-century theatre. He wrote his 'heroic comedy', unfashionably, in verse, and set it in the reign of Louis XIII and the Three Musketeers. Based on the life of a little known writer, Rostand's hero has become a figure of theatrical legend: Cyrano, with the nose of a clown and the soul of a poet, is by turns comic and sad, as reckless in love as in war, and never at a loss for words. Audiences immediately took him to their hearts, and since the triumphant opening night in December 1897 - at the height of the Dreyfus Affair - the play has never lost its appeal. The text is accompanied by notes and a full introduction which sets the play in its literary and historical context. Christopher Fry's acclaimed translation into 'chiming couplets' represents the homage of one verse dramatist to another.

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