

Cyrano de Bergerac: Poetic Speech

Name: _____

Edmund Rostand wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 1897. It is a play about a French musketeer who is a man of many gifts and talents. He is a nobleman, brave soldier, great poet, and fine musician, but he has a very large nose. Many make fun of this, and Cyrano himself believes his nose makes him unlovable. He is in love with the beautiful and intelligent Roxane. Cyrano writes a letter to her telling her of his love for her. Before he can give it to her, Roxane tells Cyrano she is in love with Christian, a handsome new soldier, and asks Cyrano to watch after Christian. Cyrano speaks with Christian who tells Cyrano about his love for Roxane. Christian

admits that he doesn't have the intelligence to win Roxane. Cyrano gives Christian the letter he wrote Roxane, which Christian then gives her as his own letter. She is impressed and wants to meet with Christian in the evening. Though Cyrano offers his help, Christian refuses, wanting to speak for himself with Roxane. When he does, it is a disaster. Roxane expects him to be as poetic as the letter, but Christian can only repeat that he loves her. She leaves in disgust. In the passage below, Cyrano steps in after Christian's failure. He tells Christian to stand under Roxane's balcony and call her. Cyrano will tell Christian the poetic words to say to Roxane.

Christian: Roxane!

Cyrano: (picking up stones and throwing them at the window): Some pebbles! wait awhile!

Roxane: (half-opening the casement): Who calls me?

Christian: I!

Roxane: Who's that?

Christian: Christian!

Roxane: (disdainfully): Oh! you?

Christian: I would speak with you.

Cyrano (under the balcony—to Christian): Good. Speak soft and low.

Roxane: No, you speak stupidly!

Christian: Oh, pity me!

Roxane: No! you love me no more!

Christian (prompted by Cyrano): You say--Great Heaven! I love no more?—when—I—love more and more!

Roxane (who was about to shut the casement, pausing): Hold! 'tis a trifle better! ay, a trifle!

Christian (prompted by Cyrano):

Love grew apace, rocked by the anxious beating. . .

Of this poor heart, which the cruel wanton boy. . .

Took for a cradle!

Roxane (coming out on to the balcony): That is better! But

An if you deem that Cupid be so cruel

You should have stifled baby-love in's cradle!

Christian (prompted by Cyrano):

Ah, Madame, I assayed, but all in vain

This...new-born babe is a young... Hercules!

Roxane: Still better!

Christian (prompted by Cyrano): Thus he strangled in my heart
The... serpents twain, of... Pride... and Doubt!

Roxane (leaning over the balcony): Well said!

—But why so faltering? Has mental palsy

Seized on your faculty imaginative?

Cyrano (drawing Christian under the balcony, and slipping into his place):

Give place! This waxed critical!...

Roxane: To-day...

Your words are hesitating.

Cyrano (imitating Christian—in a whisper): Night has come...
In the dusk they grope their way to find your ear.

Roxane: But my words find no such impediment.

Cyrano: They find their way at once? Small wonder that!

For 'tis within my heart they find their home;

Bethink how large my heart, how small your ear!

And,—from fair heights descending, words fall fast,

But mine must mount, Madame, and that takes time!

Roxane: Meseems that your last words have learned to climb.

Cyrano: With practice such gymnastic grows less hard!

Questions:

1. Why did Roxane not want to speak with Christian? _____
2. Who is "the cruel wanton boy"? _____
3. Why do you think Cyrano begins speaking to Roxane directly? _____
4. What is one explanation Cyrano gives for Christian's hesitant speech? _____
5. What is the real reason for Christian's hesitant speech? _____

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admits that he doesn't have the intelligence to win Roxane. Cyrano gives Christian the letter he wrote Roxane, which Christian then gives her as his own letter. She is impressed and wants to meet with Christian in the evening. Though Cyrano offers his help, Christian refuses, wanting to speak for himself with Roxane. When he does, it is a disaster. Roxane expects him to be as poetic as the letter, but Christian can only repeat that he loves her. She leaves in disgust. In the passage below, Cyrano steps in after Christian's failure. He tells Christian to stand under Roxane's balcony and call her. Cyrano will tell Christian the poetic words to say to Roxane.

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Questions: **Student's answers may vary: examples of correct answers:**

1. Why did Roxane not want to speak with Christian? **Because he speaks "stupidly"**
2. Who is "the cruel wanton boy"? **Cupid**
3. Why do you think Cyrano begins speaking to Roxane directly? **Because he loves her and wants to talk to her himself**
4. What is one explanation Cyrano gives for Christian's hesitant speech? **His words must rise up to her on the balcony, and it takes time.**
5. What is the real reason for Christian's hesitant speech? **Christian was repeating what Cyrano whispered to him.**