

# My Favorite World #11



One of the most memorable movies of my lifetime is the 1990 version of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, starring Gerard Depardieu. It's a grand epic, lushly staged and photographed. And Depardieu was, at the time, at the absolute top of his game.<fn>He's become something of a joke in recent years, but in this period, he was *incroyable*. With *Cyrano*, he's one of a handful to earn an Oscar nomination for a non-English speaking role.</fn>

Many buckles were swashed in the making of this film, feats of derring do beyond mortal imagination, swords flashing, death all around. And it is an unbelievably effective romance – in that sense of man-woman-crossed-stars-longing – that is not my usual cup of oolong, but when it works, one must submit or accept the ugly truth that one is made of stone.

The English subtitling was turned over to Anthony Burgess<fn>Author of *Clockwork Orange*, among many other great books.</fn>, who re-created a gorgeous rhyming couplet translation that was designed to mirror the language and rhythms of Edmond Rostand's original text. My French skills are too poor to pass any judgement on the fidelity, but the language itself is pure music.

Most people know the story...dazzling poet/war hero with a gargantuan schnozzola loves Roxanne, but feels himself too ugly to approach her as a suitor; they are, instead, great friends. Along comes the handsome, dullard Christian <fn>No really, that's his name; it's pretty clear throughout that

Rostand is something of an anti-cleric</fn>; he loves Roxanne, but only insofar as an empty imbecile can. Cyrano – who knows her soul – provides the poetry that makes Roxanne ‘love’ Christian, but Christian dies in battle and she goes to live in a convent forevermore, clutching his blood-stained farewell letter to her snowy white and ample breast.<fn>You can look it up.</fn>

Cyrano is also something of a rabble-rouser, an anti-cleric and anti-royalist troublemaker – a champion of science over superstition – who makes enemies as easily as he makes water after a night of heavy drinking. In the end, his enemies toss a huge beam off a building onto his head, delivering a not-quite-immediate mortal wound. All the better to allow him the best dying words in the history of forever.

Here’s the ending. He is visiting Roxanne at the convent, as he has done weekly since she went there to live fourteen years past. She does not know he is dying at first, and there is an amazing segment where she asks him to read Christian’s blood-stained farewell letter for the first time, not realizing that Cyrano had written it himself those years ago. But he “reads” it, word for word, from memory, in a fading twilight that could not possibly illumine a written word. In a flash, she understands that it was in fact Cyrano who wrote the words that had captured her soul, that it was Cyrano who she loved. And at that moment, death rears its head:<fn>Keep reading, it’s worth it, I promise.</fn>

CYRANO:

I believe he’s staring...

that he dares to stare at my nose, that Ruffian!

*(He raises his sword.)*

What do you say? It’s useless?...I know, ah yes!

But one cannot fight hoping only for success!

No! No: it's still more sweet if it's all in vain!

– Who are all you, there! – Thousands, you claim?

Ah, I know you all, you old enemies of mine!

Deceit!

*(He strikes in air with his sword.)*

There! There! Ha! And Compromise!

Prejudice, Cowardice! ...

*(He strikes.)*

That I make a treaty?

Never, never! – Ah! Are you there, Stupidity?

– I know that you'll lay me low in the end

No matter! I fight on! I fight! I fight again!

*(He makes passes in the air, and stops, breathless.)*

Yes you take all from me: the laurel and the rose!

Take them! Despite you there's something though

I keep, that tonight, as I go to meet my Deity,

there will I brush the blue threshold beneath my feet,

something I bear, in spite of you all, that's

free of hurt, or stain,

*(He springs forward, his sword raised;*

and that's...

*(The sword falls from his hand; he staggers, and falls back into the arms of Le Bret and Ragueneau.)*

ROXANE *(bending and kissing his forehead)*:

that's? ...

CYRANO *(opening his eyes, recognizing her, and smiling as he speaks)*:

***My panache.***

**Curtain.**

Well shit. That's a good way to die.

Note that *panache* translates several different ways – a feather, the plume in his hat, display, swagger, attack, or simply, spirit – that fit the scene perfectly. But the part of this that stuck with me over the years – the reason this makes My Favorite World what it is – is this:

Motherfucker knows the most important thing is not what happens, not whether you win or lose – the most important thing is that you take it in stride and do it with style.

*What do you say? It's useless?...I know, ah yes!  
But one cannot fight hoping only for success!  
No! No: it's still more sweet if it's all in vain!*

Come on, now....is there any better description of what it means to be an engaged human in a random and cruel universe? Yes, we do it, if only because the doing it is in itself the point.

*Ah! Are you there, Stupidity?  
I know that you'll lay me low in the end  
No matter! I fight on! I fight! I fight again!*

Cyrano knows what the outcome will be. Yet he remains one of

the great heroes in our mythic world. Not because of his exploits in battle or with a sword. That's commonplace shit. Cyrano is a hero because he refuses to relent when faced with a world of pimps and imbeciles and manipulators, even though he realizes that the resistance is likely futile. It's the willingness to stand against the madness that marks the hero.<fn>I mean for fuck sake and come on...we're arguing about vaccines again.</fn>

Keep coming at me, bitches.

*Yes you take all from me: the laurel and the rose!*

*Yet there is something still that will always be mine, and when I go to God's presence, there will I brush the blue threshold beneath my feet, something I bear, in spite of you all, that's free of hurt, or stain,*

*and that's*

*My Panache.*

Mark his words. Against all odds, you will not take my panache.

My. Favorite. World.