Cyrano De Bergerac: Tragedy Nose No Limits

While many works of fiction portray love through a utopian perspective where true love is easy to achieve, the story of Cyrano follows a failed quest for intimacy, where Cyrano's own tragic flaws stop him from achieving the romance he dreams of. It is these same tragic flaws that help to define Cyrano as a tragic hero in Edmond Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac, and it is these same flaws that eventually lead to Cyrano's tragic fall. However, some of these flaws are also the admirable traits of the large-nosed hero's character that also help to define him as hero. Due to this fact, Cyrano is able to gain respect from others, but never truly reaches his ultimate goal of having Roxane's love. While Cyrano never truly experiences Roxane's love, he still manages to make her fall in love with his eloquence and honesty of emotion. Still, Cyrano chooses not to pursue his opportunity for love because his own personal code of honor would not permit him to do so. Cyrano can be defined as a tragic hero due to the fact that his chances of reaching happiness are destroyed by his own inner and outer flaws, leading to his own tragic fall.

As opposed to Christian, his handsome yet unsophisticated counterpart, Cyrano possesses a unique, enlightened mind, but is matched by an unattractive profile. The unfortunate match of Cyrano's different characteristics creates aspects of his personality that are considered his tragic flaws. One of Cyrano's most notable traits is his large nose, which gives him a rather uncouth appearance. However, it is not the nose itself that is Cyrano's flaw, but the lack of confidence it gives him when he dreams of having the love of a woman that never leaves his thoughts. It is this self doubt that prevents the protagonist of Rostand's play from chasing after Roxane as his lover, as Cyrano explains to Le Bret, "Look at me and tell me what hope this protuberance might leave me! I have no illusions… My friend, I have bad moments now and then, feeling myself so ugly, all alone…"(50). Cyrano's uncertainty stops him from initially making any attempts at seeking Roxane's love, as well as making him incredulous about the idea of Roxane loving him in return. Along with his lack of self-confidence, Cyrano has an incredibly strong sense of selflessness that causes him to go to outrageous lengths to aid others. While a respectable trait, his extreme sense of selflessness also forces Cyrano to curb his emotions for Roxane, creating another mental blockade for Cyrano's non-existent happiness. The combination of all the negative aspects of Cyrano's traits is a key factor in what eventually lead to Cyrano's tragic fall.

Throughout the play, Cyrano never truly reaches the great height or high esteem to the extent of other tragic heroes, such as Oedipus and Macbeth, have reached. Nevertheless, Cyrano still goes through the tragic fall that all tragic heroes must go through, and does so to quite a dramatic extent. However, Cyrano's tragic flaw is much different from that of other tragic heroes in that it is stretched over a long period of time, as opposed to the rather short downfalls of other tragic heroes. Cyrano's tragic fall starts from Christian's death and ends at Cyrano's own death. When Christian dies, Roxane begins to mourn for him, but in doing so, she is mourning for the Cyrano's affection for her, which he hid behind Christian's handsome face. While Cyrano had the capability of telling Roxane the truth right after Christian's death, he instead chose not to say a word for fifteen more years. The huge-nosed hero's selflessness did not allow him to take Roxane's love for Christian's memory away from her. For fifteen years, Cyrano had the capability of finally having Roxane love him, but forced himself not to, choosing

to be scrupulous rather than self-serving. It is only at Cyrano's death, the end of his tragic fall that his selfless acts are finally discovered by Roxane, "I see the whole selfless imposture now! The letters… It was you" (217). By the end of Cyrano's long, emotionally painful tragic fall, he had become poor, unhealthy, and hated, making his downfall highly exaggerated. However, Cyrano's greatest downfall is within his inner conflict, as he was forced to suppress his emotions. The progression of Cyrano's downfall draws emotions from other characters, as well as the audience.

A main component of any tragic hero is his/her ability to play with the emotions of the audience who watches them as they go through their tragic cycle. Cyrano possesses this ability, and uses it to a great extent, causing his fellow characters and his audience to feel pity for his character. As the play progresses, Cyrano's chances at finding true happiness seem to increasingly diminish with each posterior act of the play. The love-less swordsman begins his tale with false hopes of love, and then has his hopes destroyed by Christian, only to help Christian later on in winning the love from Roxane that Cyrano truly deserved. While all of these events commanded pity from others, Cyrano's last scene is the time at which the most sympathy can be felt for him. In Cyrano's last moments alive, he realizes and condemns his own personal failures throughout his life, a dismal topic to think about in one's last moments, "I've been consistent to the end. I've failed in everything, even in my death" (219). As he reflects upon himself in his final minutes of life, Cyrano denounces himself for personal failures that others had never criticized him for. Cyrano's concluding remarks about his own defeats are presented in a judging, angry tone, however, it is with himself that Cyrano feels this way. After seeing Cyrano treat those he held dear so kindly throughout the play, the idea of Cyrano being unsatisfied with himself is shocking to the audience. The image of a wanly, wounded Cyrano cursing himself as he takes his final breath is a heartbreaking sight that causes the audience to convey feelings of pity towards the large-schnozed character.

At the end of his story, Cyrano leaves in a state far worse than the one where he started. However, Cyrano's sorrows were not inevitable, as they were not due to fate or some superior powers, but rather brought on Cyrano by himself. The play's protagonist's own predispositions—his self doubt and his selflessness—ultimately lead to his tragic fall from a position of high esteem. At the end of his downfall, Cyrano himself, affecting the audience with the feelings of pity for the dying hero, reminds the audience of Cyrano's failures. The progression of Cyrano's character is similar to that of any tragic hero, as Cyrano creates his own future destruction. Defining Cyrano as a tragic character allows for further analysis of how the play revolves around Cyrano's development as a tragic hero. Cyrano's categorization as a tragic hero shows that even the kind and noble meet tragic ends.