

# Cyrano Discussion

Modern translations of Rostand's play have substituted the phrase "white plume" for Rostand's original term, "panache." Discuss the pros and cons of this substitution and whether you agree with changing the original.

This example shows one of the major issues with translations of any literary work from the original language. While looking for an additional copy of the book to use for class we came across a myriad of different interpretations of that last line—from "panache" all the way to "warrior's breastplate," or something similar to that.

When a work is interpreted, the interpreter's job is to try to make the work understandable—for instance in Basque, the word "etxea" technically translates to "home" or "house," but can also have implied meanings of "family," "club," "clan," and "heart." How would an interpreter translate the use of that word, let's say if the hero was returning to his etxea? Would he be entering his house, or coming back to his family, or returning to the place his heart belongs?

There's a similar issue in the end of *Cyrano*. "Panache," has several meanings, and some interpreters prefer to leave the word as is, since it has a definition in English. Other interpreters prefer to translate directly, as if they had run the work through BabelFish [1]. Sometimes it works, sometimes not.

As for the "panache"/"white plume" issue, there are advantages and disadvantages to both. Panache, implies style, substance and a flair for doing things, all qualities that *Cyrano* possessed, and all the qualities that set him apart from the rest of the world. But "panache" offers a more ethereal view of what made *Cyrano* special.

White plume, on the other hand, is more direct—implying both a skill for words (white plume as a writing implement) and a skill as a swordsman (the common image of the French swordsman with a giant white feather in his hat). These were both the way that *Cyrano* displayed his uniqueness.

Personally, panache is likely the better of the interpretations, mainly because it is dealing with a personality trait, and not a physical object. When *Cyrano* is

dying, he is saying what will last after him, and one would hope it would be something about him that people remember, not something that he wears.

[1] <http://world.altavista.com/> (if you want some real fun, enter in one of your favorite quotes, translate it to another language, and then back to English).