

ARTICLE

Whose rhyme is whose reason? Sound and sense in *Cyrano de Bergerac*

Eve Sweetser, *Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley, USA*

Abstract

This article proposes a new interpretation of the relationship between poetic form and literary interpretation in Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, focusing on the special affordances of rhyme and meter in dramatic verse and on Rostand's virtuosic exploitation of poetic blending possibilities in *Cyrano*. I claim that poetic blends play a thematically essential role in this work, at a level far beyond their thematic contribution to most verse drama. Such a reading of *Cyrano* may thus help to expose general aspects of poetic blending which may be less visibly present in other texts. It also has consequences for our understanding of verbal humor and irony. In the final section of the article, I propose an extension of my analysis of metric and rhyming blends to the beginnings of a cognitive poetic treatment of intertextuality as blending.

Keywords: *blending; cognitive poetics; Cyrano de Bergerac; dramatic verse; intertextuality; irony; meter; rhyme; Rostand*

I Introduction: dialogic poetic blends

Valvert. *Maraud, faquin, butor de pied plat ridicule!*
(Rascal! Wretch! Ridiculous flat-footed scarecrow!)
Cyrano. (takes off his hat and bows as if in response to an introduction)
Ah? . . . Et moi, Cyrano Savinien-Hercule
De Bergerac.
(Ah? . . . And I'm Cyrano Savinien-Hercule de Bergerac.)
(*Cyrano de Bergerac*, II.iv)

In this passage from Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1961 [1897]), a silly nobleman shouts insults at Cyrano. The insults are not especially clever; Valvert is basically sputtering with rage at having just been verbally bested in the preceding interaction. In response, Cyrano 'introduces' himself, retroactively transforming the preceding insults into Valvert's self-introduction. This speech-act reconstrual is clever and funny in itself. And it confirms that Cyrano does not even need to bother with a verbal counterattack on Valvert, who merits no more attention than this suave 'boomerang' recycling of his own insults.

Rhyme and meter deepen the meaning of the exchange, however. Cyrano's tidy completion of the hexameter couplet form adds to the elegance of his riposte and makes the two 'introductions' into a formal unit. And once the couplet is construed as two self-introductions, each speaker is found to have labeled



himself appropriately: in particular, the paired rhyme words of the couplet, *ridicule* and *Hercule* (Hercules), succinctly sum up the contrast between the weak, foppish Valvert and the heroic Cyrano. Cyrano's verbal agility is shown by his ability to reapply Valvert's own word *ridicule* to Valvert rather than to himself – and also to exploit his own name and his opponent's preceding lexical choice, for the perfect thematically contrasting rhyme words.

This particular kind of poetic blend could not occur in non-dialogic verse; the essence of it lies in the fact that Valvert contributes one line and one rhyme word, while Cyrano not only contributes the others but coopts and redirects Valvert's line and rhyme, producing new meaning. As we shall see, a pervasive theme of the play is Cyrano's ability to control the relations between meaning and poetic form, not just in his own speech but in dynamic multi-participant dramatic dialogue. He creates poetry, exploiting even really unpromising material like Valvert's utterances – just as at another level, he creates a perfect romantic hero from himself and Christian.

In this article, I hope to do two things. The more general goal is an exposition of the special affordances of rhyme and meter in dramatic verse. The specific goal is close examination of Rostand's virtuosic exploitation of these poetic blending possibilities in *Cyrano*. I claim that poetic blends play a thematically essential role in this work, at a level far beyond their thematic contribution to most verse drama, and as in other virtuosic or 'pyrotechnic' blends, a reading of *Cyrano* may thus help to expose general aspects of poetic blending which may be less visibly present in other texts. Indeed, any analysis of poetic blends necessarily has implications for our general understanding of intertextuality.

It has long been clear to literary analysts that formal parallels can make meaningful connections between parts of a text – indeed, many would agree that artistic value is raised by regular meaningful use of formal parallels. The formal similarities between the sounds of two words (rhyme being a central case) can bring the meanings together, in one of a wide range of ways. When Hopkins rhymes *as the heart grows older/it will come to such things colder*,¹ we are invited to link the meanings of the two words in a shared frame, where the young girl's imminent growing up is not only linked to a parallel emotional 'cooling down' but is already part and parcel of her mortality, her future as a cold body in the ground. Or when Baudelaire² writes *l'amour n'a plus de gout, non plus que la dispute* and rhymes it with *adieu, chants de guerre et soupirs de la flute*,³ we are invited first to contrast the meanings of *dispute* 'dispute, conflict' and *flute* 'flute' – and then possibly take them both as examples of a broader whole, the violent and peaceful aspects of the whole life which the soul is ready to abandon.

In a cognitive linguistic model, since all linguistic signs are form–meaning blends, linking forms naturally invites linking of the associated meanings. Cognitive linguistic approaches allow us to return to insights such as those of Jakobson (1981, 1987) with new linguistic analytic tools for the appreciation of poetic structure. Recent cognitive linguistic work on literary and poetic language – and most of all on metaphor – has been fruitful and quite prolific.⁴ Perceptive

investigations of poetic form–meaning relations specifically can be found in research such as Hiraga’s (2005) analyses of iconic structure in haiku, Taub’s (2001) study of iconicity in ASL poetry, Margaret Freeman’s analyses of Dickinson (1995, 1997, 2002), Brandt’s (2004) analysis of a Shakespeare sonnet, and of course Tsur’s cognitive poetics work (1992), to name a few.⁵ Not all of these, of course, use the **mental space blending** model (cf. Turner and Fauconnier, 1995; Fauconnier and Turner, 1996, 1998, 2002) which I shall use here. But they share a goal of applying cognitive linguistic tools to form and content relations jointly, as a crucial part of understanding how poetic language is meaningful.

Verse plays are an especially complex and interesting use of such formal links, since in general the meanings of the lines are attributed to the characters, but the verse structure itself is not part of the play-internal world of the characters. Like Molière’s Jourdain in *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, who does not realize he is speaking ‘prose’, his fellow characters in poetic dramas do not know that they are speaking verse – and unlike Jourdain, they never seem to find out. Furthermore, a given verse unit is often not even attributable to a single character: when one character’s speech ends with the first line of a couplet, the next character’s speech has to start with the second line of that couplet. Frequently characters end their speeches even in mid-line – and why not? They have no individual obligation to complete a unit that (unlike the word or the sentence, for example) is not in their imagined awareness at all. But the author and the audience, of course, are presumed to see the verse pattern as a whole, and the semantic links which it adds to the characters’ utterances.

Humor and suspense inaccessible to the characters may thus be offered to the audience specifically through the rhyme scheme in a verse dialogue. The dialogic folk song ‘The Cruel War’ plays on this, as a woman repeatedly begs to be allowed to dress as a man and accompany her lover to war. For the first several verses, the final word of each of her pleas happens to rhyme with *no*, the answer which she duly receives from her lover (*I’ll pass as your comrade, no one will ever know/won’t you let me go with you? No, my love, no*). But once she switches to a different rhyme (*I love you far better than words can e’er express/won’t you let me go with you?*), she finally gets answered *yes, my love, yes*. The audience of course can hear the answer coming, while the characters in the song-dialogue cannot. A similar case is found in Racine’s *Andromaque*, II,ii, 569–70. Hermione claims now to hate her betrothed, the local ruler Pyrrhus, who has abandoned her and is eager to marry his captive (Hector’s widow, Andromaque); Oreste, in love with Hermione, urges her to leave Epirus with him and instigate other city-states to war on Pyrrhus. Oreste concludes his speech with *Faisons de notre haine une commune attaque* (‘Let’s join forces in our hatred to attack him’). An audience can feel the coming rhyme looming: how many French words rhyme with *attaque* (‘attack’)? Well, the title of the play, for example. And indeed, here comes the answer (fatal to Oreste’s persuasive cause), *Mais Seigneur, cependant, s’il épouse Andromaque?* (‘But my lord, still, what if

he marries Andromaque?’). We now know that Hermione is really still in love with Pyrrhus, making *Andromaque* a hot-button name whose form Oreste would have done better not to trigger.⁶

Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* is a particularly complex example of dramatic verse. Its form is instantly salient, since its traditional hexameter (12-syllable lines) rhymed couplets metonymically evoke the frame of mid-17th-century France: the play’s setting, and the time when ‘classical’ French drama was in flower and verse tragedy was considered its highest-prestige form. (By Rostand’s day, prose drama had ousted verse from this earlier primacy.) Further, there are times when the characters of *Cyrano* are in fact making ‘verse within the verse’. In some cases, therefore, we can potentially attribute characters’ meanings to rhyme connections, while in other cases we must assume that the poetry belongs only to the author and his audience: the characters never seem aware that they are rhyming in their speech. This is thematically appropriate, of course, since the character Cyrano is not just a poet and author of written works; he views his life as his major work, and his greatest ‘literary’ or artistic work is his creation of a romantic hero as a worthy mate for Roxane, using himself and Christian as the components. In a sense, therefore, although the play is Rostand’s poetry, the events contained in it are to be understood metaphorically as Cyrano’s poetic creation.

Cyrano therefore offers us a bravura tour of the varied potential of rhyme and meter for meaning-making at multiple levels of viewpoint. I shall begin by giving some formal definition of rhyme and related blends, within a cognitive linguistic framework. I shall then spend most of the article examining the range of rhyme and meter blends in Rostand’s literary usage – a range which extends from discourse-structural uses to irony, humor, and (perhaps most fascinatingly) the creation of a unique metaphoric battlefield for characters’ verbal conflict. I conclude with an examination of Act V, where Rostand’s use of formal echoes goes beyond rhyme to rampant intertextual reference – producing, as with rhyme, new form–meaning blends. I thus propose extensions of my analysis of metric and rhyming blends to the beginnings of a cognitive poetic treatment of intertextuality as blending.

2 Form-meaning blends and the basis of rhyme and meter blends

Like words and other grammatical constructions, rhyme and meter are seen within blending theory as form–meaning blends. This means that there is a crucial relationship between the form space in language and the meaning space expressed by it. But what exactly is that relationship? Before I get more specific about rhyme and meter, let me devote just three paragraphs to a few basic definitions within the theories of mental spaces and blending.

Mental spaces are structured chunks of our cognitive patterns which can be linked with each other in systematic ways. One kind of mental space is an

imagined situation or state of affairs; so mental spaces cover the territory of 'possible worlds', although not only that territory (Fauconnier, 1994, 1997; Fauconnier and Sweetser, 1996). Relationships between mental spaces include referential *mappings*: to give a very simple example, I can refer to a real-world actor (e.g. Vivien Leigh) by the name of the role she plays in a movie (e.g. 'Scarlett O'Hara'). More complex relationships include *blending* or *conceptual integration*, which involves making use of mappings between two or more spaces (the *input spaces*) to set up a new space (the *blend*); mappings between input spaces are normally structured by a *generic space* (Turner and Fauconnier, 1995; Fauconnier and Turner, 1996, 1998, 2002).

A very simple blend such as the semantics of an adjective–noun compound demands that we integrate the meanings of the two words (Sweetser, 1999). In the case of *red ball*, one very obvious reading takes two input spaces (external color and shape) and a generic space consisting of our visual experience of objects, which normally have both shape and surface color; from these spaces, it is very easy to produce a blend wherein *red* describes the color and *ball* the shape of a single object. More complex blends can have contradictory inputs with selective projection to give a coherent structure in the blended space: for example, Fauconnier and Turner's (1996) example of a modern philosopher's 'conversation' with Kant, where one cannot simultaneously project Kant's time-frame and the modern philosopher's time-frame into the blend. Metaphor is one kind of blending: a kind where one of the two input spaces (the *source domain*) is the primary determinant of the blend's inferential structure. Thus, for example, in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) celebrated example *this relationship is a dead-end street*, our understanding of dead-end streets tells us that the relationship has no potential for productive continuation.

But how does all this relate to form and meaning? Well, first of all, there is no doubt that these two spaces are tightly linked: pronunciation of linguistic form quite automatically evokes the relevant meaning structures in a native speaker, just as the need to express a meaning evokes an appropriate form for production. This is true of forms at many levels; individual words and morphemes, but also larger constructions such as sentences, passives, conditionals, etc.,⁷ and it is frequently the case that form has an *iconic* relationship with meaning; for example, a form like *meow* resembles the sound it represents, or the repetition in *he talked on and on* indicates a longer event by using a longer form to describe it. Iconic as well as metaphoric blends are important in poetic structure, as Taub (2001) and Hiraga (2005) have shown.

Two general facts are most important for our understanding of rhyme and meter. First, a unit of linguistic form is generally understood to correspond to a unit of meaning. A word, or a sentence, or a phrase, is a coherent chunk of form, and also of meaning. Linguistic form has natural rhythmic structure, which can be exploited to set up regular metrical units distinct from grammatical units: lines, stanzas, and so on. These formal units are naturally construed as being mapped onto coherent chunks of meaning. Second, related or partially shared

forms are often (though not always) understood to have related meanings. In everyday language, this is the basic principle of morphology: *baseball* and *football* each have *ball* in them, or *walks* and *walked* each have *walk* in them, so they must be related in meaning. In poetics, this is the basis for a semantic interpretation of rhyme. Even morphologically and semantically unrelated words can echo each other's final phonological sequence in an appropriate way (see the metrics literature cited above), and this can be exploited to create formal patterns. Interestingly, these formal patterns are construed as creating meaning relationships as well, as in the examples discussed above.

So here we have cases where relationships in one space (poetic linguistic form) are construed as mapping onto, and dynamically building up, relationships in another distinct space (poetic linguistic meaning). This is a classic case for blending theory.

Returning to meter, in setting up any formal poetic unit – the hexameter line, the Petrarchan sonnet, the ballade, the Germanic alliterative four-stress line, or the five-act play – we also set up a new meaning unit, because of the pervasive nature of form–meaning blending in language. The boundaries of these poetic units may either coincide with those of other linguistic units (clause boundaries often coincide with line boundaries in epic verse in particular) or be orthogonal to them, and we are now invited to look for unities of meaning where there are unities of form: the 14 lines of a good sonnet form a tight and relatively autonomous conceptual unit in a way that 14 sequential lines of a novel, or even an epic poem, chosen at random, probably would not.

Rhyme and meter (singly or together) group the words in a verse line as a formal unit. This invites a new conceptual integration:

(1) the metrical line's contents as a meaning unit.

While syntactic boundaries and line boundaries coincide, we do not expect much added 'meaning' from line boundaries; but when multiple characters contribute to a line, or when 'enjambment' gives us salient differences between the two kinds of boundaries, the meaning affordances of metrical line units stand out more clearly. For example, when Rostand breaks a line between characters in *Cyrano* I, ii, below, the content of the broken line certainly forms a new whole. The four speakers (a bourgeois literary aficionado and three nobles who range in interests from more intellectual and artistic to more military) are jointly giving a profile of *Cyrano* in this line, which makes its unity of meaning clear.

Ragueneau: Rimeur! (*Rhymer*)
Cuigy: Bretteur! (*Fighter*)
Brissaille: Physicien! (*Natural scientist*)
Le Bret: Musicien! (*Musician*)

Line-internal rhyme further links each pair of named vocations, *rimeur/bretteur* and *physicien/musicien*, helping point up the contrasts between the vocations of

poet and warrior, and between science and art. These rhymes exploit the basic French masculine agentive ending *-eur* and another basic occupational suffix *-ien*, thus further emphasizing the parallelism between a *habitual* rhymer and a *habitual* fighter, or a natural scientist and a musician, and suggesting that Cyrano has not only many abilities, but also many vocations. The single line here is not iconic only for some general unity of meaning; the diverse semantics fitted into this one line are iconic and metaphoric specifically for the diversity of Cyrano's talents, united in a single person. The fact that these very different characters (with their different social and intellectual viewpoints) contribute to the one line further reinforces our understanding of how versatile an individual Cyrano is, and indeed, the second line of the couplet, said by a poet who is also present, sums this up in saying *Et quel aspect hétéroclite que le sien!* ('And what a varied aspect/face he presents!').

Both rhyme and meter also group the *lines* into a formal unit or units sharing metrical properties, which invites the conceptual integration:

(2) the formal group of lines (poem, rhymed couplet, stanza. . .) as a meaning unit.

In the following passage from *Cyrano* IV. iii, Cyrano's Gascon regiment is at war, and starving because they are surrounded and their supplies cut off. Cyrano has a musician play a traditional Gascon folk tune on his fife, to distract them from their hunger; they become dreamily homesick instead, for a moment. The Captain fears that Cyrano is making the cadets 'soft' with this sentimental reverie.

Cyrano: Laisse donc, les héros qu'ils portent dans le sang
Sont vite réveillés! Il suffit. . .
(Don't worry, the heroism in their blood
is speedily awakened! All it takes. . .)
[He gestures, a drum rolls, and the cadets leap to their feet, arms in hand.]
Les cadets: Hein! . . . Quoi? . . . **Qu'est-ce?**
(Huh. . . What? . . . **What is it?**)

Cyrano: Tu vois, il a suffi d'un roulement de **caisse!**
Adieu, rêves, regrets, vieille province, **amour**. . .
Ce qui du fifre vient s'en va par le **tambour!**
(You see, all it took was one **drum** roll!
Farewell, dreams, regrets, old home province, and **love**. . .
The effects of the fife are chased off by the **drum!**)

The pair of lines rhyming in *qu'est-ce/caisse* are of course parts of a single statement about the ease of bringing the cadets to attention – and the two rhyming words are closely linked in the meaning frame as well as in sound, since the drum (*caisse*) is what makes the sound which instantly brings a homonymous

watch response ('What is it?') from the cadets. Similarly, the *amour/tambour* couplet is all about the contrast between sentiment (evoked by the fife) and soldierly courage (evoked by *tambour*, another word for drum); not only does the couplet encapsulate a complete aphorism on this subject, but the rhyme words come from the two contrasting models – the emotional state involved in one frame, and the musical instrument evoking the other. It is worth noting that the *qu'est-ce* line also exemplifies category (2) earlier. The presence of Cyrano's *is speedily awakened! All it takes* in the same line with the cadets' *What is it?* is a particularly graphic demonstration of Cyrano's point – indeed, a better completion of his meaning than he could have made by speaking himself.

Rhyme and alliteration and meter all also make specific formal connections between smaller units: the rhyming or alliterating words, or the metrical half-lines, for example. These facts invite further conceptual integrations:

(3) The meanings of rhyming, alliterating, etc. subunits are connected.

Not only is a whole poem a meaning unit (the 14 lines of a sonnet are a classic example), but so are stanzas of a poem: the final rhymed couplet of an Elizabethan sonnet normally produces a final comment or twist on the ideas offered in the preceding *abab* quatrains, for example. Rhyme can be a powerful device for connecting *non-adjacent* pieces of text (such as the two *a* lines of an *abab* quatrain, which are a formal unit), and/or longer sequences of text. It can also connect very short and immediately adjacent units, as for example in the line from Cyrano I. ii cited above (*Rimeur. . .Bretteur. . .Physicien. . .Musicien. . .*)

A metrical foot is generally only of interest within a larger unit such as a line; indeed the larger unit is a crucial factor in determining how we should interpret the poetic metrics of a particular phonological sub-unit.⁸ Rhyme, on the other hand, can simply link individual rhyming words – or, parasitic on meter, it can (metonymically) link the entire metrical units which end with those rhyming words.

Finally, as stated above, although these kinds of meaning connections are possible in any poetic form, there are special affordances of form–meaning blending which arise from the superimposition of dialogue onto verse. We now turn to Rostand's extended exploitations of these special affordances in *Cyrano* – exploitations which are integral to both the poetic form and the plot of the play.

3 The Hôtel de Bourgogne: rhyme, meter, and polyphonic voice

The initial scenes of *Cyrano de Bergerac* take place on an evening in 1640 at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where a play is about to be performed. The various characters present include theater staff (pages, a food vendor), the gradually gathering audience (including initially a drunkard, an avid theater-goer, and a bourgeois with his son; then nobles arrive), and a pickpocket and his apprentices

who are there to work the crowd. In the following example (I.i.25–30), characters complete not only each other's couplets (25–6, *coupez-la* and *j'étais là*), but each other's lines: two speakers' words make up line 27 (*illustres*), and three speakers (including the preceding two) contribute to the other half of the same couplet, line 28 (*lustres*). More interestingly, and less typically of verse drama, these characters are not engaged in a single conversation, but in multiple parallel conversations between characters who might not interact directly (given social divisions), and in fact do not even all hear each other. The pickpocket is covertly advising his trainees, the theater buff bragging to his friends, the bourgeois informing his son, the vendor advertising refreshments, and the theater employee calling to colleagues for the lights to be lit.

The pickpocket: La dentelle surtout des canons, **coupez-la!**

(Particularly the canons' lace, **cut it off!**)

A spectator: Tenez, à la première du *Cid*, **j'étais là!**

(You know, at the first performance of *le Cid*, **I was there!**)

The pickpocket: Les montres. . . (the watches)

The bourgeois: Vous verrez des acteurs très **illustres**. . .

(You'll see really **illustrious** actors. . .)

The pickpocket:

Les mouchoirs. . . (the handkerchiefs)

The bourgeois:

Montfleury. . . .

Someone shouting from above:

Allumez donc les **lustres!**

(So light the **chandeliers!**)

The bourgeois: . . . Bellerose, l'Epy, la Beaupré, Jodelet!

A page: Ah! Voici la distributrice! . . .

(Oh, here's the food vendor!)

The vendor (female): Oranges, **lait**, . . .

(Oranges, **milk**, . . .)

Individual rhymes here are meaningful in the usual ways: rhyming *lustres* 'chandeliers' with *illustres* ('illustrious') is an amusing change of register from the high-flown to the everyday concrete, as well as a play on the etymological relation between the two words.

But by letting these multiple characters' voices 'collaborate' to make hexameter lines, and rhymed couplets – a structured and unified formal whole – Rostand's blend conveys the broader message that at the content level these parallel interactions between diverse individuals form a unified social whole. Perhaps the message is that Parisian society is somehow an organic whole, despite class and other social divisions; or perhaps a more interesting interpretation is that dramatic artistic performance brings together disparate segments of society into a community. This could well be Rostand's bourgeois

late-19th-century message; and if so, it cannot reasonably be put in the mouth of any character within the play's 17th-century setting under the French monarchy. It is appropriately expressed not by those characters' words, but by their interleaving relationship to the metrical structure of the whole.

Of course, we could alternatively focus on the fact that these characters are talking 'past' each other rather than having single conversations, and make this interaction emblematic of a *lack* of unity in the content, thematically contrasting with the continuing formal unity of the meter. However, there are several reasons not to take this viewpoint. First of all, Rostand is not a social critic in the modern sense – he may criticize hypocrisy, for example, but he is not interested in critiquing the social structure at large; and second, the characters exist in apparent harmony. All of them except the thieves fill necessary roles in the larger event in which they participate (the theatrical production of the 'play within a play' which does not take place), and even the pickpocket turns out to supply crucial information leading to the discovery of the ambush for the poet, which Cyrano foils. Far from emphasizing conflict between the voices, Rostand seems to present them as complementary parts of a whole, and to playfully demonstrate his skill at allowing these complementary voices to constitute a single poetic structure.

As we shall see in the next section, Rostand systematically makes floor-sharing meaningful in *Cyrano*, in a way that other verse dramatists had not; so it is by no means far-fetched to attribute meaning to it in these initial scenes.

4 (S)word-fights: the rhyme for the fight, and the fight for the rhyme

The most dramatic scenes of Acts I and II of *Cyrano* are Cyrano's duel with Valvert at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and his confrontation with Christian in the story-telling scene among their regiment (the *cadets de Gascogne*). Both of these scenes show clearly the iconic and metaphoric relationship between verbal sparring and physical combat, in Rostand; and in both scenes, the poetic form itself plays a crucial role in the verbal sparring. When we see that one character controls the rhyme, or coopts another character's rhyme, Rostand's form–meaning blend simultaneously lets us know that the character is 'winning' in the confrontation at the content level.

Here are some basic metaphoric mappings between the domains of combat and verbal interaction:

ONE-ON-ONE LINGUISTIC EXCHANGE IS A DUEL.

HOLDING THE LINGUISTIC FLOOR IS HOLDING YOUR GROUND.

CONTROLLING THE DISCOURSE IS BEING IN CONTROL OF THE COMBAT INTERACTION.

LOSING THE FLOOR (or losing discourse control by allowing your opponent to phrase things his way) IS LOSING ADVANTAGE IN THE DUEL.

The duel at the theater (I.iv) is provoked by Cyrano's stopping the lead actor from performing. Valvert, a foppish noble audience member, apparently wants to show off and decides to challenge Cyrano, as mentioned at the start of this article. He does this clumsily by saying *Vous. . .vous avez un nez. . .heu. . .un nez. . .très grand* ('you. . .you have a nose. . .uh. . . a nose . . .that's very big'). Valvert's repetitions and hesitations draw extra attention from the formal fact that not only each repetition, but even *heu* ('uh'), is a syllable counted in the hexameter. Worse, even with these added syllables, he cannot even provide his own couplet-final rhyme, leaving Cyrano to complete the second line with a single straight-faced syllable of accord, the one-word sentence *Très* ('Very'). This mocking completion of the couplet is sophisticated irony. It comments on the simultaneous triteness and hyperbole of Valvert's language – rather as if a modern American speaker had said *your nose is really big* and the addressee had replied *Really*. It adds further irony by rhyming and contrasting with Valvert's preceding grandiose word-choice *traits* ('shafts, darts'), uttered as the latter was boasting to friends about his 'arsenal' of verbal resources to insult Cyrano. And it shows that Cyrano is in control, of form and content: he has the right word, and ironically coopts Valvert's rhyme scheme along with his content.

In further response comes the celebrated *tirade du nez* ('tirade of the nose'), wherein Cyrano wittily offers a long and uninterrupted monologue of better-crafted insults on the same subject: 'Oh, how sweet, you're offering the birds a special perch?' or 'When it bleeds – the Red Sea!' or '*What* a sign for a perfume-store!' or 'This can *only* be Aristophanes' fabled *hippocampelefantocamélos!*'. Cyrano thus completes the demonstration of his overwhelming superiority to Valvert in linguistic competition – so overwhelming that he can afford to 'help' the hapless Valvert insult him. Valvert is enraged by this arrogance from someone clearly poorer and less well dressed than he is, so Cyrano goes on to offer a concise and elegant statement of the superiority of moral *élégance* over literal finery. Valvert sputters with rage again, only to have his insults returned upon him by Cyrano's 'self-introduction,' discussed above as the opening example of section 1.

Finally, Cyrano undertakes a literal sword-fight with Valvert, and expresses his intention to compose a *ballade* while fighting the duel. The *ballade* is rather formulaic, but humorous and stylish; it is not nearly as meaningful poetry as Cyrano can write, as we later find out from his last letter to Roxane. The duel itself is also rather perfunctory and formulaic on Cyrano's side; although he performs with style, he obviously does not have to put forth his best fighting efforts for such an opponent. The relationship between the two activities is iconic as well as metaphoric, since the aspectual form of the ballade parallels the form of the duel. Its refrain is *à la fin de l'envoi, je touche* ('at the end of the last verse, I strike home'), and indeed Cyrano pinks Valvert neatly as he says that final line, concluding the duel and the poem together. In the blend, the two are one: Cyrano's swordsmanship is as artistic as his verbal art is competitive, and Cyrano's mastery is such that he can (1) perform victoriously in both metrics and

sword-fighting simultaneously, and (2) completely control the course of both competitions, so that they follow exactly his desired structure and timing.

One important aspect of the *ballade*/duel is that, unlike the hexameter lines of the play's basic discourse, everyone involved is aware that poetry is happening. It is *not* just Rostand and the real-world audience who are aware of the blend between verbal composition and combat. The characters all understand the connection, and are wildly admiring of Cyrano as a result. Later that same night, Cyrano excites further intense admiration from Paris by another amazing feat of swordsmanship, a fight against overwhelming numbers – and, continuing the literary connection, it is in defense of a poet who is being attacked as punishment for satirizing a nobleman. It is in the wake of these two literal (though literarily overlaid) combats that Cyrano and Christian meet the next day, and engage in their famous verbal tussle in II.ix.

Cyrano's confrontations with Valvert and Christian both have other overt causes; but, like Valvert, Christian is Cyrano's rival for Roxane. Cyrano knows that the powerful (and married) de Guiche wishes to seduce Roxane, and has selected Valvert as a complaisant husband for her; and by the time Cyrano and Christian meet, Roxane has confided in Cyrano that she is in love with Christian, and believes he loves her too.⁹ Since Cyrano has promised Roxane that Christian will be protected from duels, he can thus have only a verbal 'duel' with him; and in fact it is Christian who provokes it and takes the initiative. He is a new boy and Northern outsider in the exclusive and duel-crazy Gascon regiment, so he decides to cope by taking on the top dog directly. Having been told that Cyrano does not tolerate the slightest reference to the entire semantic field of the nose,¹⁰ he systematically interrupts with such references as Cyrano is telling the story of the fight that took place the previous night after the theater duel.

In the initial exchange between Christian and the cadets, we see the use of rhyme in a traditional role of highlighting and emphasizing the rhyme words. Christian first 'reflects' a cadet's contemptuous description of him as an 'apprentice'. His repetition not only questions the term, but imitates and comments on its Gascon pronunciation; and it is crucial to the rhyme, since standard French *apprenti* would not rhyme with the following *maladif*, which he also repeats as a threatening challenge to the speaker.

(II, 9)

Cadet. Le récit du combat! Ce sera la meilleure
leçon pour ce timide apprentif!
(*The fight story! That'll be the best
lesson for this timid apprentice!*)

Christian. Apprentif? (*Apprentice?*)

Un autre cadet. Oui, septentrional *maladif!*
(*Yes, you sickly northerner!*)

Christian. Maladif? (*Sickly?*)

This possible argument is deflected by advice from cadets to Christian never to mention anything related to the nose in Cyrano's presence. There is then a general call for Cyrano's story; the unanimity of this demand is emphasized by a line composed of three utterances from different speakers, all repeating the word *récit*, and with a different possessive pronoun before it in each instance. By chance of the French morphological system, these three possessives rhyme with each other as well. From differing points of view, all speakers are united on one rhyme and one content.

First cadet:

Maintenant, **ton récit!**
(Now, your story!)

All:

Son récit!

(His story!)

Cyrano:

Mon récit?

(My story?)

Cyrano now tells the actual story, with interruptions from Christian. The interruptions develop into a competition, a verbal tussle. As seen below, sometimes Christian succeeds in 'stealing' the rhyme from Cyrano, inserting his own word into the rhyme scheme and indeed forcing Cyrano to participate (as with *illuminés*) in a rhyme with *nez* 'nose' or an associated word. In this initial case, Cyrano has presented Christian with a rhyme word for *nez*; so in a sense he has laid himself open, unaware, to Christian's attack. In other cases, as with *dent/imprudent*, where the interruption does not come at the end of a metrical line, Cyrano succeeds at least in incorporating Christian's interruption into his text and maintaining his own independent rhyme scheme.

Cyrano:

. . .Et les quais n'étant pas du tout **illuminés**,
Mordious! On n'y voyait pas plus loin. . .
(And since the quais were entirely **unlit**,
God's death, you could see no further. . .)

Christian:

Que son **nez**.

(Than your **nose**.)

[Cyrano breaks off and turns aside to ask the captain who this guy is; he receives the (by now expected) confirmation that this is Christian de Neuville, whom Roxane told him about. Cyrano rather brokenly resumes his story and his rhyme scheme.]

Carbon: Il se nomme
Le baron de Neuvil. . .
(*He's called the Baron de Neuvil. . .*)

Cyrano: Ah! C'est bien. . . Je. . . très **bien** –
(*Oh! All right. . . I. . . fine. . .*)
Je disais donc – Mordious! . . . que l'on n'y voyait **rien**.
(*So I was saying – God's death! – that one could see nothing*)
. . .

Cyrano: . . .
J'allais mécontenter quelque grand, quelque prince
(*I was going to displease some high-up, some prince*)
Qui m'aurait sûrement. . .
(*Who would surely hold me. . .*)

Christian: Dans le nez
(*In the nose*)

Cyrano: une **dent** –
Qui m'aurait une dent, et qu'en somme, imprudent. . .
(*A tooth; /who would 'hold me a tooth' – and so, imprudently,. . .*)
(*Note: Avoir dans le nez means 'have it in for [someone]'; avoir une dent means 'have a grudge [against someone]'.*)

These contrasts cannot be described either in terms of form alone or meaning alone. Inside the play world, the characters are unaware of the form world of rhyme and meter; even Cyrano never betrays overt awareness of rhyme or poetic structure in the dialogue, though of course he is aware of them in his *ballade*. In the content world of the plot, therefore, speakers cannot understand themselves to be 'winning' or 'losing' depending on how their words fit into these formal structures. Of course Cyrano does not want references to noses, but we are never told that it matters where they come in the poetic line or how they relate to rhyme. Only in the form–meaning blend (where the rhyme gives emphasis to the meanings) and in the metaphoric blend (where verbal competition *is* combat) can Cyrano be seen as 'winning' when he keeps the dialogue to the non-'nasal' rhymes.

Unlike Valvert, Christian is a worthy opponent in verbal combat, and is giving Cyrano real trouble. Cyrano is both exasperated and appreciative. He stops the verbal exchange, orders the onlookers out of the room, and offers his friendship to Christian. This develops into their alliance to woo Roxane – a logical if not natural development, since both of their suits are presently at a standstill: Cyrano's (of which Christian remains unaware) because she has fallen for handsome Christian, and Christian's because he feels incapable of articulating his romantic feelings.

Act II ends with the original onlookers returning to the room in Scene xi, all frantically curious to know what has happened, and amazed to see Christian alive

and unhurt. One of them, a musketeer who wants to show off for his girlfriend,¹¹ incorrectly concludes that Cyrano has relaxed his rule about ‘nasal’ references; he starts to follow Christian’s earlier example by commenting on an imagined odor in the room. In two words and one blow, Cyrano reasserts his complete mastery of the situation at both levels. He takes over the impertinent musketeer’s line-final *reniflée* (‘sniffed/snuffled’) and brings it ominously into rhyme with the penalty for such an utterance – *giroflée* (‘slap, cuff’, with an olfactory pun on *girofle* ‘cloves’) – while simultaneously putting his new rhyme word into action by slapping the offender.

The *musketeer*: . . .Quelle odeur! Mais monsieur doit l’avoir reniflée?
 Qu’est-ce que cela sent ici?
 (*What a smell! [to Cyrano:] Surely you’ve sniffed it, sir?*
What does it smell of, in here?)

Cyrano (slapping him): La giroflée!

Needless to say, the musketeer attempts no reprisals in words or in blows, although within this social group either a verbal insult or a slap in the face would normally evoke a challenge to combat. Rostand’s stage directions tell us that the cadets then go wild with joy at the knowledge that Cyrano is back ‘in form’ and the world is back to normal.

5 Form-meaning blends matter: the poetic hero, the artistic life, and fictional truth

But I am an artist too, and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth. The only truth I can understand or express is, logically defined, a lie. Psychologically defined, a symbol. Aesthetically defined, a metaphor. (Ursula LeGuin, Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, New York: Ace Books, 2000).

As suggested above, *Cyrano* is a play where the literary structure is constantly and consciously being used to convey content. Yes, rhymes matter. The lives of the characters are metaphorically understood as poetry – and conversely, the poetry of the play’s language conveys the character’s lives. So I would argue that the formal patterns discussed above are crucial to the play’s basic themes.

The single most obvious blend in the play is that of Cyrano and Christian combining to make a heroic lover for Roxane. Below is the basic structure of that blend, which holds in Roxane’s belief space for most of the play’s duration.

Inputs:

Both Cyrano and Christian are noble, courageous and deeply in love with Roxane.

Cyrano is eloquent, Christian is handsome.
 Cyrano makes up the lines, Christian delivers them and gets the kiss in return.
 Cyrano writes the letters (and risks his life crossing enemy lines to send some of them), Christian fronts them.
 Cyrano's tears fall on the final love-letter, written in the probable belief that he and Christian are both going to die in battle and never see Roxane again; Christian's life-blood stains the same letter.
 Christian dies (in battle), Cyrano consciously makes a tragic personal sacrifice for Roxane by letting her continue to believe Christian wrote the letters.
 Neither of them ever does sexually consummate his love for Roxane. (Thanks to Cyrano, de Guiche arrives on the scene just too late to prevent Roxane and Christian's wedding; but he punishes Christian and Cyrano by sending them to war on the spot, where Christian dies in battle. And Roxane never knows of Cyrano's love till he is dying.)

The Blend: Roxane has a noble, handsome, brave and brilliantly eloquent lover, who loves deeply and writes utterly irresistible love-letters, and gets at least one memorable kiss in return. Knowing he is about to die in battle, he sheds tears on his final farewell letter to his still-virgin beloved before he dies bravely and tragically (for her) with the letter against his heart, so that it is also stained with his blood.

Cyrano and Christian together ultimately constitute not only one ideal lover, but one tragic *martyr* to Love. Roxane does not of course think of Christian as having died specifically *for her*, or for Love; and Cyrano does not die in combat (ironically, and despite his final stance with literal sword in hand for metaphoric combat, he is murdered in a fake accident). But Cyrano makes an immensely painful personal sacrifice for Roxane and for his ideals of Love, while Christian dies a heroic death in battle. Earlier on, Cyrano clearly sees himself as the more important partner in the blend; by Act III, seeing the effect of the letters (written by Cyrano alone) and urged on by a suddenly aware Christian, he is even considering being open with Roxane. But when Christian dies, Cyrano clearly revises his estimate of their respective contributions to the blend, and decides that he cannot claim Roxane over Christian's dead body. When Roxane finally says to the dying Cyrano (V.v) 'why have you been silent for 14 years, when these tears – shed on a letter he had no part in – were yours?', he replies simply, pointing to Christian's blood-stains on the letter, 'That blood was his'. And yet of course it is Cyrano who – like Roxane – knows the letter by heart and can recite it to her before he dies, even though the autumn afternoon (more metaphoric blends!) has become too dark to read.

But why isn't all this just silly – or silly and tragic? Shouldn't Roxane have been left to figure out that she loves Christian (if she does) without his being eloquent – or more likely, that she loves Cyrano without his being handsome? Plenty of women do fall in love with otherwise attractive men who cannot talk

about love, or with plain but eloquent men. Isn't it immoral of Cyrano to deceive Roxane, making her think she loves a person who does not exist – and maintaining that illusion for 14 years after Christian's death, until Cyrano himself is dying? Given that this illusion robs them of all chance of real happiness as a couple, hasn't Cyrano uselessly ruined Roxane's life and his own, supposedly in the name of self-sacrifice and perhaps actually in the service of his artistic creation? The plot of *Cyrano*, recounted as an outline without Rostand's words and characterizations, immediately raises these questions.

Rostand's amazing success – after all, few of his contemporaries' plays are successes on stage (and screen) a century later – lies in convincing even a modern audience to see things otherwise. Roxane is not just pettily demanding that her wooers be able to say things prettily; she is sharing and actively participating in Cyrano's intoxicating dream of artistically articulated love, and although the result of Cyrano's artistry is tragic, it is heroically so; his creation was a genuinely great one. Cyrano's whole life – never lived in public artistic 'success' because he is true to real artistic creation – is a heroic tragedy too. In a delightful whimsy, Rostand's fiction postulates that the successful Molière stole some of his best scenes (in particular a classic of French comedy, the 'What the devil was he doing in that galley?' scene from *Scapin*) from Cyrano's unpublished writing – so that Cyrano's literary greatness is credited to another, just as his love was. His ironic self-proposed epitaph is 'Molière has genius, and Christian was handsome'. Art and true love are dangerous and often tragic personal ventures, unappreciated by the public because they are automatically adulterated by popularization.

So a second, even more basic set of blends underlie Rostand's play and Cyrano's life, which might be summarized as below.

HUMAN LIFE IS ART.

LIVING A LIFE IS AUTHORIZING ART; A LIVING PERSON IS THE AUTHOR/ARTIST OF HIS OWN LIFE.

Inferences:

Life has esthetic value, as art does.

Life has form ('style') and meaning, as art has form and meaning.

Life is judged by both its form and its meaning and the relation between them, just as art is.

In the play, specific subcases of human activities are thus seen as art:

LOVEMAKING IS POETIC COMPOSITION.

COMBAT IS POETIC COMPOSITION.¹²

LOVE IS WAR/DANGER.

ART/POETIC COMPOSITION IS RECKLESS RISK-TAKING, (PHYSICAL) COMBAT.

ART/POETIC COMPOSITION IS LOVE.

[Multiple blend: Art is love and physical risk >> Art is pure, ideal, lovely, private (unpopular), exaggerated, and dangerous.]

In what other world could it *matter* so much whether Cyrano can out-rhyme Valvert as well as out-fight him; or whether Cyrano or Christian will control the rhyme in their tussle over the fight narrative? *Cyrano* is all about the importance of form, and the improbable but heroic triumph of Art over realistic and practical Life.

So when Christian just keeps repeating to Roxane, *I love you, I adore you*, not only does she reject this avowal (III.v) but she is right to do so: an avowal of love is incomplete, *without a form which is of a quality equal to the love expressed*. Of course this is so. In Art, the Medium is the Message: or perhaps more fairly, the quality of the meaning must be matched by the quality of the form for successful art. The difference between Cyrano and most people is that since Life is Art, every act and word in his life needs to meet standards of form as well as standards of content or meaning.

Similarly, and perhaps tragically, it may be Cyrano's devotion to equal perfection in form and meaning in Life (not just in Language) which makes him so sure that he needs Christian's bodily beauty to be the 'form' half of his hero blend. Roxane is beautiful both in bodily form and in 'content' (soul and mind), and her language, like Cyrano's, carries genuine feeling in elegant form. To match her, Cyrano needs his Blend. In a telling quotation from Auden, the relationship between body and soul becomes a metaphor for the relationship between poetic meaning and form, as well as for the tightness of the blend between them: *The formal structure of a poem is not something distinct from its meaning but as intimately bound up with the latter as the body is with the soul*.¹³ Cyrano would have agreed – and would have mapped the other direction as well.

So we can add another blend here, namely Cyrano's relationship to the Blended Hero. He 'authors' his own life, in the blend wherein living is artistic authorhood. But he also 'authors' the artistic blend of his life and Christian's which becomes the Blended Hero.

These blends therefore offer a solution to another problem: an audience can scarcely help wondering about the relationship between Cyrano's clearly expressed devotion to Truth and the great deception he has lived. We know his unwillingness to undertake even minor social hypocrisy, and his insistence that personal artistic judgment cannot be given up (to revisions by a possible publisher, for example). In the final scene, he dies proclaiming his courageous lifelong fight against Lies or Falsehood (*le Mensonge*). However, once again, only in one input space (his base 'reality' space, where he and Christian are definitely two people and Christian is inarticulate) has he been deceptive to Roxane. In the blend, he has sublimated Truth to a higher level, making his love for Roxane (with great artistic honesty) into the love of her Blended Hero – a lover who, in this world where Life is Art, is not only greater, but even more truly himself than his real, literal self. He authors his own life, partly by making it an input to the life of the Blended Hero whom he authors – and the Blended Hero not only loves Roxane but tells her so honestly and beautifully. Cyrano's deception of Roxane is therefore, paradoxically, the fullest and highest

expression of his love that he could have made – and one that could not have been made in another way. As Ursula LeGuin says:

If I could have said it non-metaphorically, I would not have written all these words, this novel; and Genly Ai would never have sat down at my desk and used up my ink and typewriter ribbon in informing me, and you, rather solemnly, that *the truth is a matter of the imagination*. (Ursula K. LeGuin, Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, New York: Ace Books, 1969)

And, as Cyrano would agree, Truth is a matter not only of metaphor but of artistically right Form–Meaning blending.

Returning to Cyrano's place in all this, let me emphasize yet again that Cyrano, as character interacting in the characters' space, is only aware of some of Rostand's artistic structure. He is certainly aware of his metaphoric understanding of his life and Self as purposeful, artistic and authored – and consciously proud of his 'creation' of a hero for Roxane from himself and Christian – and we would expect him, given these blends, to be constantly aware of his everyday word choices and actions – of their 'style' as well as their content. This is saliently true – it is one of the things that people admire in him, and he reflects consciousness of it when he talks about 'moral elegance' to Valvert in Act 1. But once readers are aware of these blends, of course they can interpret Rostand's conscious use of meter and rhyme not only as part of the same message, but as part of Cyrano's presentation of that message and not just Rostand's. After all, the most bravura examples are put in Cyrano's mouth, consciously uttered by this form-conscious character – who is both a playwright (he has 'rhymed five acts', as stated in Act II) and a major causal force in the plot of this play, which after all is about his life. In an added form–content blend of play and contents, therefore, Cyrano is the poet/author of the play, not just of his life which is the content of the play, and in his blended role as poet-author of the play, of course he can be seen as conscious of all the basic poetic structure of Rostand's dialogue.¹⁴

At any rate, it is clearly no accident that the form of this play is so tightly tied to its content. Every rhyme in Rostand's play, every symmetry in its structure, is 'about' the crucial point that it is artistic structure that makes life beautiful and great. It would not be possible to make this point in the same way with a 'realistic' modern prose dramatic form. Although of course such a play could still be very artistically structured, the structure would not be as overt, as in-your-face as the formal poetic structure of *Cyrano*. *Cyrano* is not about the unobtrusive art of realism; it's about Artistry that intervenes unrealistically and quixotically, authoring Life. So it is true genius on the part of Rostand to have put his meter and rhyme directly into his audience's consciousness, and even into his plot interactions.

6 The last act: rhyme, repetition and intertextuality

The last act of *Cyrano* is not just the conclusion of the plot. It is also formally the equivalent of a final movement of a musical piece, pulling all the formal themes together along with the content. In short, it is awash with intertextuality, of which I will consider only a few cases here. It therefore affords a special opportunity to consider formal blends arising from textual repetitions of sequences longer than a final rhyming syllable.

Roxane has mourned for 14 years, since Christian's death. Cyrano has remained her friend and visitor in the convent where she resides as a widow, refusing to remarry. Now Cyrano is fatally injured by a cowardly enemy in an arranged 'accident', but lives long enough to come to the convent on his usual visit to Roxane. Hiding his injury but knowing he is dying, he decides to say farewell to her in the words that he himself chose years ago. So in V.v he asks her to let him read 'Christian's' last letter, which she doesn't know he has ever seen. He reads it aloud, and they live different blends as he reads. Initially, she is hearing Christian's (often-reread) words, while Cyrano is speaking with multiple voices. Surely he is speaking for his present self – the dying 40-year-old Cyrano who still has not declared his love to Roxane. But he is just as surely reliving his past self's experience – the younger Cyrano who wrote this letter years earlier, knowing that he might die in battle the next day without declaring his love or saying farewell except in this indirect way – and he speaks (as ever) for the blended hero whom he and Christian made up. In the presence of this text, we have evocation therefore of at least four spaces within which it is meaningful: Christian on that long-ago eve of battle, young Cyrano on the same long-ago night, the Blended Hero on that same night, and the presently dying Cyrano.

In short, the letter means something different to the audience in this context, as it does to Cyrano, than it did when he wrote it in Act III; and yet it does so by evoking the original meaning and blending it with the current context. This is the essence of intertextuality: repetition, quotation and citation of a form do not cast off the meaning-frames carried by the form in its original context, but *blend* that context and meaning with the current context and meaning. Act V continues, intertextual throughout.

Gradually, Cyrano's tone of voice, together with the realization that he already knows the letter by heart (it's too dark to really read it) enlighten Roxane to the whole story. Still not realizing that he is dying, she overwhelms her weakened lover verbally, forcing a confession from him. To do so, given that this is Cyrano, she naturally needs to take control of the rhyme scheme as well. Each of his denials therefore evokes from her only another aspect of the truth she is assimilating, in form as well as in content. He says *non, non, Roxane, non!* ('No, no, Roxane, **no!**') and she replies *j'aurai du deviner quand il disait mon nom* ('I should have guessed when he said my **name**'). When he protests *je vous jure*. . . ('I **swear** to you. . .'), she cuts him off with *j'aperçois toute la généreuse imposture* ('I see the whole generous **deception**'). Grabbing the rhyme for the

next whole couplet, with Cyrano only offering helpless mid-line interpolations of ‘no!’, she goes on:

Les lettres, c’était vous! (Cyrano: Non!) . . . les mot chers et **fous**
 C’était vous. . . (Cyrano: Non!) La voix dans la nuit, c’était **vous!**
 (The letters, that was you! [Cyrano: No!]. . . those dear, **mad** words,
 That was you. . . [Cyrano: No!] the voice in the night, that was **you.**)
 (V.v)

Her rhyme words sum up part of her message – a loving accusation, ‘you madman!’.

Roxane decides she is winning the argument because Cyrano’s protests have become weaker, and says *Déjà vous le dites plus bas!* (‘Already you’re saying it more **softly!**’). He essentially gives in, but reclaims gallant overt control of both rhyme and content (bringing both back to negation), as he replies *Non, non, mon cher amour, je ne vous aimais pas* (‘No, no, my dear love, I did **not** love you’). This tender and ironic pseudo-denial is apparently his life’s sole declaration of passion to her in his own person; the rest, the ‘direct’ ones, are all presented under Christian’s alias. Her own subsequent declaration of love is simpler, a direct ‘I love you’, and her echo of his ‘I swear’ is a serious oath to remember him and Christian together.

This *bas-pas* rhyme echoes the final couplet of II.viii, where Le Bret is responding to Cyrano’s *non, merci!* tirade against the world. The audience knows, though Le Bret does not, that Cyrano’s intended love declaration to Roxane has just been thwarted by her revelation that she is in love with Christian. Eventually realizing that Cyrano’s sudden extreme bitterness is really personal, despite his philosophical justifications, Le Bret says:

Fais tout haut l’orgueilleux et l’amer, mais, tout **bas**,
 Dis-moi tout simplement qu’elle ne t’aime **pas!**
 (Out loud [publicly], act the proud cynic – but **quietly** [in confidence],
 Just tell me she does **not** love you.)
 (II.viii)

In Act V it is Cyrano and Roxane, using the same rhyming forms, who renegotiate the relationship between low-voiced privacy and denial of love.

In a very complex re-use of interwoven motifs, *Nous sommes les cadets de Gascogne* (‘We are the cadets of Gascony’, V.vi), is an echo of the first line and refrain of the regiment’s old song of pride (II.vii, IV.x). In the earlier contexts, it shows regimental pride and courage – in Act II it shows the audience what kind of regiment Christian is joining, and in Act IV Cyrano recites it as the cadets make a hopeless but courageous charge. Here, it evokes Cyrano’s Gascon pride and courage in the new context of facing his imminent death from accidental injury – and it also perhaps ironically refers back to Christian’s death just before its recitation at the end of Act IV.

Further, this echoic use of *Gascogne* in V.vi rhymes with an immediately preceding repetition of Cyrano's old reproof to his friend Le Bret, *voilà Le Bret qui grogne!* ('There's Le Bret grumbling again!', I.vii, V.vi). This was originally uttered in Act I, as a laughing brush-off of Le Bret's sensible warning that Cyrano could not take on 100 opponents alone (which of course he could, and won). Cyrano also accuses Le Bret of grumbling (*grogner*) in II.viii when he advises against Cyrano's bitterly expressed intention to take on the whole world as enemies rather than seek a patron; and again in IV.i, when Le Bret reproaches Cyrano as the latter returns from crossing the enemy lines to mail a letter from 'Christian' to Roxane. So here in Act V, the accusation of grumbling becomes an ironic comment, as Le Bret finally rages against the futility of Cyrano's death – too late, when Cyrano cannot turn back from danger. In short, this form-echoing couplet resumes Cyrano and Le Bret's whole relationship; it reinforces Cyrano's own metaphor for his life and death, as a metaphoric solitary fight against a legion of enemies which he enumerates in his final speech (naming Falsehood, Compromise, Prejudice, Cowardice, and Stupidity) – and Le Bret's habitual role in trying to moderate the rashness and 'exaggeration' of this solitary fight.

As a last example, the line-internal rhyme *Rimeur! Bretteur! Physicien! Musicien!* (I.ii; see section 2 earlier), originally a laudatory multi-speaker introduction to Cyrano's character, in Act V is now reworked slightly into his own suggestion for his more serious epitaph (as opposed to the ironic one mentioned earlier), which begins:

Philosophe, physicien,	<i>Philosopher, natural scientist,</i>
Rimeur, bretteur, musicien,	<i>Rhymer, fighter, musician,</i>
Et voyageur aérien,	<i>And aerial voyager,</i>
(V.vi)	

The irony is clear: true genius, unpopular in life, is praised after death. And Cyrano wants it that way. As he turns insults into acts of self-introduction by the speaker, he transforms his friends' actual praises of the living Cyrano into an epitaph – with an even more elaborate rhyme structure than the original, naturally. We might see this epitaph as merely boastful; but once again, recall that Life is Art and Art is Life. Cyrano is here, as in the Heroic Lover blend and in his whole life, engaging in metaphoric construction of Self – important construction, since a poetic epitaph, possibly to be inscribed on a tombstone, could become a long-term *material anchor*,¹⁵ a blended access to the dead person. And his added elaboration of the rhyme scheme is simply another instance of what Cyrano does as naturally as breathing: making Art out of Life's less artful everyday materials.

We might pause a moment here to recall that Cyrano did not hear the original praise which he now 'cites' in his epitaph: he had not yet come on stage at the point when Le Bret and others said those lines in I.ii. However, Cyrano is the ultimate poet, playwright, and author – in the blend, though not of course in his base character space, his authorial structuring extends to his life and those around him. Of course he knows all the earlier lines from his own 'self-authored' life.

No wonder he can actively play with rhymes, while the other characters remain, like Jourdain, unaware that they are speaking verse. Rostand's most successful blend, Cyrano is the ultimate recursive poetic blender.

7 Conclusions

Blending theory allows cognitive linguists to explain some of the complexity of Rostand's form–meaning relationships. It lets us unpack the relationship of Cyrano and Christian to Roxane's hero, as well as the metaphoric links between Cyrano and his 'authored' life. Standard metaphor theory would not be able to do this, since of course neither Christian nor Cyrano is a metaphor for the other: they are both inputs to a Hero blend. And as Hiraga (2005) shows so clearly, blending theory lets us unpack the form–meaning relationships built up by rhyme and meter, giving us a language in which to start talking about poetic units and how they build meaning. This in turn opens the door for unpacking Rostand's particular uses of interaction between dialogue and poetic form. And as we saw in section 6, blending theory seems ideally adapted to analysis of intertextuality: it allows us to map the building of new meanings in flexible and combinatorial fashion as we combine a text with new contexts.

Blending theory also standardly accounts for the cognitive relationships between author and work, characters and plot, which Rostand exploits so extensively. From its inception (Fauconnier, 1994), mental spaces theory has been built to accommodate the contrasts and links between story and play worlds and the 'base' spaces of narrators, authors and readers (see Sanders and Redeker, 1996). When these spaces are not merely linked but blended (as when Cyrano becomes blended with the 'poet' or 'author' of the play), blending theory allows us to consider both the interaction between these spaces and the non-interactions. As the blend dictates, then, Cyrano 'wins' when the rhyme is according to his design. But as the character space would dictate, there is no overt consciousness of this: Cyrano never rages *Don't mess up my rhyme scheme* at Christian, in their verbal exchange in Act II. Perhaps he might have, if Pirandello rather than Rostand had written the play, but Pirandello's blend between playwright's and characters' spaces is very different from Rostand's, allowing much more overt recognition of the blend in characters' expressed consciousness.

Although plenty of work remains to be done, blending theory has therefore given us tools to appreciate aspects of Rostand's achievement that might previously have been hard to articulate clearly. The aspect which stands out for me is the extent to which Rostand succeeded as outrageously as Cyrano, and at the same game. He used a form which was already out of date and 'distancing', and a plot which might even seem on its own to be improbable or ridiculous. But he made his forms meaningful at multiple levels, and thereby convincingly and artistically constructed new complex blended meaning; and reflexively he made that kind of meaning-construction the point of the play, as Cyrano makes it the point of his life.

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Notes

- 1 Spring and fall: to a young child.
- 2 *Les fleurs du mal*, LXXX, 'Le gout du néant'.
- 3 'Love has no more savor, nor does conflict; farewell, songs of war and sighs of the flute.'
- 4 See particularly Turner (1987, 1996); Fauconnier and Turner (2002); Lakoff and Turner (1989); Donald Freeman (1978, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2004); and the papers in Bradshaw et al. (2004).
- 5 The present work, like Sweetser (2004), intends to follow the tradition set by these cognitive linguistic works and by other work such as Traugott (1989) or Hanson and Kiparsky (1996, 1997) in bringing current linguistic tools to bear on poetry to produce the kind of insights Jakobson would have appreciated.
- 6 This is actually the first of three instances where the word *Andromaque* occurs as a rhyme word in the play, always rhyming with *attaque*.
- 7 Among many important references on this topic, see Lakoff (1987); Fillmore et al. (1988); Langacker (1987, 1991a, 1991b); Goldberg (1995). For mental spaces treatments of constructions, see Fauconnier and Sweetser (1996); Dancygier and Sweetser (2005).
- 8 Although formal phonological analysis of meter falls outside the rubric of this article, very interesting applications have been made of current metrical phonology to poetic texts (inter alia, see Kiparsky (1987); Kiparsky and Youmans (1989); Hanson and Kiparsky (1996, 1997). Both in everyday language and in poetry, it seems, metrical context is important in deciding what metrical role a syllable or word plays.
- 9 Yet another metaphoric 'duel': that very morning, Cyrano has just fought and won a heroic and invisible fight for self-control. He was about to declare his own love for Roxane, when she made him instead her brotherly confidant about her love for Christian. When she ends their conversation by complimenting him on last night's fights, he justifiably and truthfully (though cryptically) says, *J'ai fait mieux depuis* ('I've done better since then').
- 10 Perhaps even the entire *semiotic* field; a hyperbolic cadet tells Christian that 'You pull out your handkerchief, it might as well be your shroud' (II.ix).
- 11 The girlfriend is the younger wife of the kindly middle-aged baker Ragueneau; Cyrano has already reproved her for her lack of concern for her husband's feelings, so he may have a double reason for keeping the musketeer in line.
- 12 Even baking is poetic composition, as we see in Ragueneau's instructions to an apprentice baker (II.i) *Vous avez mal placé la fente de ces miches: au milieu la césure, entre les hémistiches!* ('You misplaced the cut on these loaves; the cesura should be in the center, between the half-lines!').
- 13 From the jacket of *W.H. Auden Reading His Poems*, Caedmon Records TC1019. Quoted in Traugott (1989).
- 14 If Cyrano is here blended with Rostand, we may observe that this kind of author-protagonist blend is common and pervasive. Authors throughout history have found that audiences attributed to them the opinions which they put in the mouths of their protagonists, whether or not they intended those opinions to be taken seriously.
- 15 Fauconnier and Turner (2002).

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Address

Eve E. Sweetser, Dept of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720–2650, USA. [email:sweetser@berkeley.edu]