

Guide to *Cyrano de Bergerac*

Genre – Drama

Cyrano de Bergerac is a “heroic comedy,” a kind of play that focuses on a noble character who experiences some kind of test having to do with a romantic relationship. This kind of play has a happy ending, but usually contains some tragic events as well.

Setting – taken from <http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides7/Cyrano.html>

Acts I, II, and III of Cyrano de Bergerac take place in Paris in 1640, when Louis XIII sat on the French throne and the extraordinarily talented Cardinal Richelieu managed the affairs of state. Act IV takes place in the same year on a battlefield in northeastern France during the French siege of the disputed city of Arras, held by the Spanish, during the Thirty Years War. Act V takes place in Paris in 1655, when Louis XIV was king of France. Present-day Arras is the capital of the Pas de Calais département (province) of France.

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Savinien *Cyrano de Bergerac*

"A large nose is the mark of a witty, courteous, affable, generous, and liberal man." -Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac

Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, the model for Rostand’s romantic hero, was a real man with a large nose who was born in Paris, France, on March 6, 1619. Cyrano lived during the age of musketeers, but was not a musketeer himself, although he enjoyed dueling with swords, and with words. As a young man, Cyrano enlisted as a cadet with the Noble Guards of Captain Carbon de Casteljaloux. In 1640, after being wounded in the battle at Mouzon, Cyrano joined the regiment of the Counts, and participated in the siege of Arras, just as in Rostand’s play. The Count of Canvoye, who was in Cyrano’s regiment, asked Cyrano to help him write letters to his new wife, who wrote to him three times a day. The Count was not a gifted writer, and so Cyrano wrote love poems for the Count to send to his wife, just as Rostand’s Cyrano writes love letters for Christian to send to Roxane. After being wounded again, Cyrano returned to civilian life, where he lived in the intellectual circles of Paris, and wrote plays, letters, maxims, and even scientific studies. The public turned against Cyrano when they thought that one of the lines in his tragedy *La Mort d’Agrippine* was sacrilegious. Not long after, and perhaps not accidentally, a beam fell from a roof and hit Cyrano on the head, eventually causing his death.

Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*

Rostand was intrigued and inspired by the life of Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac. Rostand’s Cyrano has many of the same experiences as the real Cyrano, but he is more importantly the embodiment of idealism. Rostand’s Cyrano hides his self-consciousness behind elegant, bold poetry and belligerent dueling.

Cyrano longs to be admirable in everything he does, only to prove to himself that he can be. Cyrano wants the whole world to be beautiful, romantic, honorable, and loyal. He defends his own honor by dueling, and he protects Christian's honor by helping him to appear brilliant for the woman he loves, Roxane. Cyrano, too, loves Roxane because she is beautiful, but she also comes to symbolize for Cyrano the tragic fate of unrequited love, another romantic notion. Cyrano continues to love Roxane because to love from afar someone he can't have is poetic. He wants Roxane to have Christian because she loves Christian, so to unite the lovers is noble. This love of romantic idealism is Cyrano's *panache*.

La Préciosité

The term *préciosité* refers to a trend in 17th century Paris, which focused on the philosophies of love and courtship. Many of the ideals of *préciosité* can be traced back to the ideals of courtly love, made popular among nobles in the Middle Ages. In *préciosité* matters of the heart were considered of utmost importance, and were to be treated with the highest respect and decorum. Roxane is often referred to as a *précieuse*, meaning that she is a student of the *préciosité*, meeting often in salons to discuss the art of love, write poetry, and study the guidelines of the movement. The art of courtship was such an important study that a map was constructed, called *La Carte de Tendre*, or the Map of Tenderness. This map illustrates the various proper routes to affection one may take in courting, including the route of inclination, the route of esteem, and the route of gratitude. As a *précieuse*, Roxane is very concerned with the propriety of courtship, including both the written word and the spoken word. To simply tell a woman, "I love you," goes against everything the *préciosité* trend stood for. A man must woo a woman with elegant poetry, stepping carefully along the map of tenderness until the appropriate moment arrives. Cyrano, of course, is well acquainted with the *préciosité*, which is why he becomes such a valuable helper for Christian, who is not familiar with the movement at all.

Characters – from <http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides7/Cyrano.html>

Cyrano de Bergerac: Main character (protagonist). As a member of the French guards, he is an extraordinary swordsman and fearless warrior. He is also a charming and witty conversationalist, an accomplished poet, and an outspoken literary and social critic who makes many enemies. Cyrano is in love with his cousin, the beautiful Roxane, but refrains from wooing her because he believes his extremely large nose would cause her to reject him.

Baron Christian de Neuvillette: Young man from Touraine who comes to Paris and falls in love with Roxane. Unlike Cyrano, he is flawlessly handsome. However, he lacks the wit and charm of Cyrano and is incapable of writing love letters and poetry. Cyrano selflessly agrees to become his mouthpiece in the wooing of Roxane. Christian joins the guards and goes off to war with Cyrano. De Neuvillette is modeled on a real-life person of the same name who was a soldier in Savinien Cyrano's unit.

Comte de Guiche (Count de Guiche): Dastardly nobleman who, though married to the niece of Cardinal Armand de Richelieu, attempts in various ways to make Roxane his mistress. She resists his advances. In his role as a commander of French forces at Arras, he assigns his enemies, Cyrano and Christian, to dangerous duty. De Guiche later reforms and becomes a friend of Cyrano. He is modeled on a real-life character, Count Antoine de Guiche, who was believed to be an upright man.

Roxane: Sobriquet of Magdaleine Robin, an orphaned young woman of exquisite beauty. Because Cyrano and Christian love her and de Guiche lusts after her, she is the fulcrum on which the plot turns. Roxane is highly intelligent. The soul of a man—his esprit and aesthetic sensitivity—seems to mean more to her than his outward appearance. Rostand modeled Roxane on Savinien Cyrano's real-life cousin.

Ragueneau: Friend of Cyrano. He is an outstanding pâtissier (pastry cook) and lover of fine poetry. At his shop, he gives away his finest pastry creations for the poems of his customers and eventually goes bankrupt. Afterward, he becomes Roxane's servant.

Le Bret: Good friend of Cyrano and member of the guards. He continually warns Cyrano that his outspokenness is making him many enemies. Le Bret is modeled on a real-life friend of Savinien Cyrano.

Carbon de Castel-Jaloux: Captain in the guards.

Les Cadets (The Cadets): Guard privates who aspire to become officers.

Lignière: Drunken writer who, like Cyrano, makes many enemies. Cyrano foils a plot by de Guiche to kill Lignière.

Viscount de Valvert: Friend of de Guiche who taunts Cyrano.

Montfleury: Actor whom Cyrano chases off a stage at the beginning of a performance of the stage play *La Clorise*. Rostand modeled him after the real-life actor Zacharie Jacob Montfleury (1610-1667).

First Marquis, Second Marquis, Third Marquis: Noblemen who attend the stage play *La Clorise*.

Bellerose, Jodelet: Members of the acting company scheduled to perform *La Clorise*.

De Cuigy, de Brissaille: Gentlemen who attend the scheduled performance of *La Clorise*.

D'Assoucy: Friend of Cyrano.

Un Fâcheux (Bore, Pest, Nuisance)

Un Mousquetaire (Musketeer): Soldier who attends the scheduled performance of *La Clorise*. (A musketeer is so named because he carries a musket into battle.)

Un Autre (Another Musketeer)

Un Officier Espagnol (Spanish officer)

Un Cheveu-Léger (Soldier in the Light Cavalry): This cavalier is among those who attend the scheduled performance of *La Clorise*.

Le Portier (Doorkeeper): Theater doorman who checks to see whether attendees have paid the price of admission.

Un Bourgeois: (Burgher, or Middle-Class Citizen): Person who attends the scheduled performance of *La Clorise*.

Son Fils (His Son): Son of the burgher.

Un Tire-Laine (Pickpocket)

Un Spectateur (Spectator)

Un Garde (Guardsmen, Soldier)

Bertrandou le Fifre (Bertrand the Fifer)

Le Capucin (Capuchin Monk): Priest who marries Roxane and Christian. He is a member of the Capuchins, a branch of the Franciscan order.

Deux Musiciens (Two Musicians)

Violonistes (Violinists)

Les Poètes (Poets)

Les Pâtissiers (Pastry Cooks)

Mère Marguerite (Mother Marguerite): Nun. She is the mother superior at the convent in which Roxane resides in Act V.

Soeur Marthe (Sister Martha), Soeur Claire (Sister Claire): Nuns at the convent in which Roxane resides in Act V.

Lise: Wife of Ragueneau.

La Distributrice: Girl who sells refreshments from a counter (buffet) near the entrance of the theater.

La Duègne (Chaperone, Duenna): Woman who accompanies Roxane.

Une Comédienne (Comedian): Comic actress in the play.

La Soubrette: Actress in the play. (A soubrette plays the part of a mischievous and perhaps flirtatious character in a comic stage play or an opera.)

Boudu, Boissat, Cureau de la Chambre, Porchères, Colomby, Bourzeys, Bourdon, Arbaud: Members of the Académie Française (French Academy) who attend the scheduled theater performance. The academy was established in 1634 to maintain the purity of the French language and to uphold high literary standards.

Les Pages (Pages)

Richelieu: Historical personage mentioned in the play. Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu (1585-1642) was a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and one of the most effective statesmen in French history, taking the necessary steps to make France a great power in the seventeenth century.

D'Artagnan: Musketeer who congratulates Cyrano after the latter defeats de Valvert in a sword duel. He was a real-life personage (Charles de Batz-Castelmore, Comte d'Artagnan) who joined the French guards after 1640. Before Rostand fictionalized him in *Cyrano*, Alexandre Dumas the elder (1802-1870) did so

in *Les Trois Mousquetaires (The Three Musketeers)*, his popular 1844 novel.

La Bouquetière (Shop girl)

Les Laquais (Lackeys): Uniformed servants; followers; toadies.

Madame de Guéméné, Madame de Bois-Dauphin, Madame de Chavigny: Ladies who attend the theater performance.

Le Duc de Candale (Duke of Candale): Patron of Montfleury. He presumably becomes an enemy of Cyrano after the latter forces Montfleury off the stage.

Balthazar Baro: Author of the play *La Clorise*, scheduled to be performed in the theater at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Paris. He has no speaking role. Baro was a real person who wrote and staged a play called *La Clorise*.