

Cyrano de Bergerac

By Edmond Rostand

Journal

Title the next blank page in your notebook: Cyrano de Bergerac. Answer the following prompt in 5 sentences or more:

Judging by images shown on TV, in movies, and advertisements, there are few things our society prizes more highly than physical beauty. In your opinion, why do we value physical beauty so highly? What relationship does it have to inner beauty?



Edmond Rostand (1868-1918)

- Born in Marseilles, France
- Law degree
- Writing is a reflection of his passion for history
 - Wrote poetry and plays
- Revived the Romantic Drama
 - Rejected Naturalism
 - “Out of date”

Naturalism

- Advanced stage of realism
 - Portraying real life
- Harsh nature settings
- Stresses the governing of human life by natural laws
 - Theater should explain the scientific laws of human nature
- Objective presentation of human beings as victims of forces beyond their control
- Reaction against the Romantic movement
- Response to Charles Darwin

Romanticism

- Idealism and heroism
 - Idealism = unrealistic optimism
- Power of emotion
 - Even it's irrational, it affects how people see the world
 - Emotion is a gateway to knowledge
- Looked to Nature for inspiration
- Refused to be constrained by social or literary or political conventions
- Revolutionized the way poetry was written
- Response to Enlightenment
 - Reason over emotion

Context

- France, 1640-1655
- Louis XIII
 - Political tension and conflict with foreign enemies
- Armand-Jean du Plessis Richelieu
 - Dominated the political landscape
 - Roman Catholic cardinal and the chief minister and advisor to King Louis XIII
 - Strengthen the French monarchy and make France the most powerful nation in Europe
 - Led France into the Thirty Years' War
- Thirty Years' War
 - France became Europe's leading power
 - French siege of Arras – setting in the play
 - Conquered Arras from Spain

Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac

- 1619-1655, Paris
- French satirist and dramatist
 - **Satire**: a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn
- Basis of romantic, but unhistorical, legends.
- Rostand portrays him as a gallant, brilliant, shy, and ugly
- Wounded in the Siege of Arras in 1640
- Studied under a philosopher/mathematician that inspired his writing
- Ridiculed authority, particularly in religion



Drama

- **Drama** is an art form that allows us to be spectator/participants in a story.
 - Makes powerful comments on human nature and the human condition
 - Reveals human truth arising out of characters under pressure of situation
 - It is a persuasive and memorable mode of conveying truth
 - Visual, auditory, and spoken.
- **Tragedy** is the branch of drama that treats in a serious style the sorrowful events experienced, encountered, or caused by a heroic individual.
 - Originated from the Greeks and derived from Homer's works.
- **Comedy** is the branch of drama meant to be amusing and entertaining
 - Happy endings
 - Imitation of the ridiculous

Characterization

- **Protagonist**: main character, “good guy”
- **Antagonist**: group/person who stands against the protagonist, “bad guy”
- **Foil**: a character whose main purpose is to offer a contrast to another character, usually the protagonist.
 - Foils set off and accentuate the main character and are convenient ways to complicate and deepen the characterization of the protagonist.
 - The foil's differences highlight the key qualities of the main character.
- **Confidante**: a character in a story whom a protagonist confides in and trusts
 - Friend or authority figure
- **Chivalry**: code expected of knights in medieval times
 - In literature: honor and courtesy

Heroism

- **Archetype**: ancient, universal character types, patterns, and symbols.
- Popularized by literary critics of the psychologist Carl Jung.
- Archetypal Figures:
 - Mother/father figure, child, devil, god, wise old man/woman, trickster, **HERO**
- Can you identify examples of any of these archetypes?



Literary Terms

- **Soliloquy**: monologue given by a character in a play who is alone on the stage
 - Usually reveals key thoughts, feelings, and opinions to the audience
- **Aside**: when a character's dialogue is spoken but not heard by the other actors on the stage
 - Useful for giving the audience special information about the other characters onstage or the action of the plot.
- **Irony**: a contradiction between appearance/expectation and reality.
 - Observation about the ridiculous situations people find themselves in
 - Verbal, Situational, Dramatic
- **Hyperbole**: an exaggeration of ideas meant for emphasis.

Act I Questions

- Who are the people we meet in the first scene? What does this tell you about the play's audience in this setting?
- What is your impression of Christian? How do the stage directions, his own words, and other characters' words contribute to your first impression?
- What is unusual about Ragueneau?
- Why do you think the playwright waits to have Cyrano show up?
- How do others react when Roxane arrives?
- Who is Valvert? How does Christian feel about Valvert?
- Why does Montfleury leave the stage? How does the crowd respond?

Act I Questions

- How does Valvert insult Cyrano? Why does he insult his physical appearance?
- How does Cyrano gain revenge against Valvert? Did Valvert deserve it?
- What does Cyrano reveal to Le Bret?
- What is Le Bret's advice to Cyrano regarding his love for Roxane? What is Cyrano's reaction?
- How does Cyrano's mood change after the visit from the duenna?

Act II Questions

- Who is the more practical character: Ragueneau or his wife, Lise?
- How does Ragueneau fuse cooking and writing?
- How are Ragueneau and Cyrano alike?
- How is the Cyrano in Act II different than the Cyrano in Act I?
- How do we see dramatic irony in Act II?
- How does Cyrano's pledge to protect Christian enhance the dramatic irony?
- Why does Cyrano reject De Guiche's offer to have Richelieu to help him with his play? Why does De Guiche make the offer?
- Is Le Bret a good friend? Why or why not?

Act II Questions

- Why does Christian insult Cyrano's nose? How does Cyrano react?
- Why does Cyrano decide to help Christian?
- Is Cyrano's dishonesty toward Christian about Roxane justified? Why or why not?
- What influences Cyrano's mood the most?
- What is Cyrano's internal conflict in this act?

Act III Questions

- Why is it ironic that Roxane accuses Cyrano of being jealous of Christian's poetry?
- De Guiche vows to Roxane that he will take revenge on Cyrano. What do you think is driving De Guiche's dislike of Cyrano?
- What is ironic about what Cyrano says to Roxane on the balcony through Christian?
- What does the balcony scene remind you of?
- What role does the darkness play in the balcony scene?
- How does Roxane take advantage of the monk's visit?
- How does De Guiche separate the newlyweds?

Act IV Questions

- Do you think Cyrano goes too far in writing letters for Roxane? Why or why not?
- What is the significance/symbolism of De Guiche's white scarf? What does he do with it? What does Cyrano think of the scarf?
- What is the significance of the tear on Cyrano's letter?
- When Roxane arrives at the camp, how do the Gascon's actions reflect chivalry?
- What is the honorable decision that De Guiche makes in Act VII? Does this redeem him? Why or why not?
- Does Christian realize Cyrano's true feelings when he sees the letters? How do you know?

Act IV Questions

- Why is Christian saddened by Roxane's comments about how she loves his inner beauty?
- How does Cyrano bring Christian comfort? Is this deceptive act justified? Why or why not?
- What do you think would be Roxane's reaction if she were to learn the truth about Christian and Cyrano?
- What do you think of Roxane after Act IV? Is she worthy of Christian or Cyrano's love? Why or why not?