South Pasadena High School The English Seminar—AP

Drama © Nicholson

## Some pronunciation helps

🔾The stress in French words falls always on the last syllable. No matter what.

🔾A consonant at the end of a word is not pronounced, except for the letters *c, f, l,* and *r*, conveniently the consonants in the English word ‘careful.’

🔾An unaccented final *e* on a word is silent; *é* is pronounced roughly as ‘AY.’ The preposition *de* is pronounced ‘duh.’

🔾The sound ‘AY’ can be spelled *é, ë, et, ais, ait, aient,* and several other ways.

🔾The sound ‘OH’ can be spelled *au, aud, aut, eau, eaux, os, ot*, and several other ways.

🔾The letters *c* and *g* are always soft (as in the English ‘cent’ and ‘gent’) before the vowels *e* and *i*, always hard (as in the English ‘cat’ and ‘got’) before *a, o,* and *u*.

## Some proper names

Cyrano see-rahn-OH

de Bergerac duh bear-zhur-AK

Christian krees-tee-YANg

de Neuvillette de nuh-vee-YET

de Guiche duh GEESH

Rageuneau rah-guh-NO

Le Bret luh BRAY

Carbon kar-BONg

de Castel-Jaloux duh kas-TEL jah-LOO

Lignière lean-YAIR

Vicomte vee-KONTE

de Valvert duh val-VER

Marquis mar-KEY

Montfleury moan-flur-EE

Bellerose belle-ROSE

Jodelet zho-duh-LAY

Cuigy kwee-ZHEE

Brisaille bree-SIGH

Bertrandou bear-trahn-DOO

Roxane roke-SAHN

Lise LEEZ

Marguérite mar-gur-REET

de Jésus duh zhay-ZU

Marthe MART

Claire KLAIR

## Two cultural notes

•The particle *de* in a family name denotes nobility only if spelled with a small ‘d.’ Spelled with a capital ‘D,’ it indicates simply a geographical origin, perhaps long lost, of the family, but no social status.

•Ranks of French nobility (in descending order):

Duc [Duke]

Marquis

Comte [Count]

Vicomte [Vicount]

Baron

Chevalier [Knight]

### Act 1

## Some specific questions to answer

1. The mention of Corneille (4) and *Le Cid* (5) suggest the setting; the announcement that Corneille is actually in the audience for the performance of *Clorise* (8) sets the time. Who is Corneille, what is *The Cid*, and when, then, does Rostand’s play take place?
2. Who are the Muses (10), how many of them are there, what are their names, and over what field does each reign?
3. For what reason does Christian appear to have come to the play? Why does he plead with Lignière not to go? What convinces Lignière to stay?
4. Long before Cyrano’s first appearance, Rostand begins preparing his character. What is our first impression of Cyrano, and how does Rostand implant it?
5. Explain the insult Cyrano delivers to the citizen by asking for the loan of a jawbone (22), and give the origin of the story to which he alludes.
6. The “nose speech,” Cyrano’s longest and most famous, needs careful staging. How should the actor read it? Where in the speech should he project changes in mood? Which of the other characters should react, how, and at what points? What might be some of the dramatic purposes of the speech? Why does Rostand place it so early in the play?
7. Where is Gascony? Burgundy? Paris?
8. Who was Cyrano de Bergerac? When did he live, and for what was he known?
9. Who is the “Musketeer” who congratulates Cyrano after the duel (36), and what is the source of the allusion Rostand is making?
10. Bellerose’s line after the duel (36) contains most of the saying *Sic transit gloria mundi.* What is its origin, what does it mean, and why does Bellerose use it here?
11. Rostand sums up much of Cyrano’s character in the one line “But—what a gesture!” (37) Explain its paradoxical meaning and in what way his line, “Why yes— your hand to kiss” (39) echoes that meaning.
12. Who is “the Cardinal” mentioned repeatedly (18, 39), and what is “the Academy” (39)?
13. Cyrano’s confession of love is really one long speech, interrupted only briefly by Le Bret (“I love…have I the look of Dante?” 40-42). What reaction does Rostand want from the audience, and what techniques does he use to try to achieve it?
14. What is a duenna? (43)
15. The cut-purse who tried to steal from Christian (16-17) seemed to be a touch of color when he first appeared. By the act’s end, though, we realize his importance to the plot. Why has Rostand created him?

### Act 2

## Some French

*en gelée* (50) jellied *Félicitations* (53) Congratulations

*rôti* (50) roasted *Mon dieu!* (87) Oh, my! [Lit. ‘My God’]

*Ciel!* (51) Heavens!

The term “My dear…“ (69) is short for ‘my dear friend’ and has no other connotations.

## Some literary terms

dactyl (50)

hemistich

cæsura

male rhyme (51)

female rhyme

couplet

Ballade (54)

## References and allusions

muse (50)

\*Malherbe (51)

\*the Bacchantes

Orpheus

Ulysses

Penelope

Phœbus

Phœbus Apollo (56)

Cupid

\*Bensarade (60)

\*Saint-Amant

\*Chapelin

\*D’Urfé (64)

\*Agrippine (72)

Three Musketeers (75)

Mammon

## Some more questions

1. Identify in detail the effects Rostand tries to achieve through the \*juxtapositions [1] of food and poetry (50-53) and [2] of the accounts of the violence and Cyrano’s poetry (55-56). What other examples of ironic juxtaposition appear in this act?
2. How does Cyrano react to Rageuneau’s reasons for allowing the poets to take advantage of him? How does Rostand want an audience to react? (58)
3. Rostand has Cyrano twice in this act use the repetition Henri Bergson signals as a comic technique—first with his “ah” responses as Roxanne declares her love (62-63), then with his greeting, “Baron” (67-68). Should each be played for comedy, and, if so, why and how?
4. Why does the stage direction call for Cyrano to “turn… pale” during Roxanne’s speech? (63)
5. What promises does Roxanne extract from Cyrano? (65)
6. What precisely does Cyrano mean by his “throw-away” line, “I have done better since!”? (66)
7. Explain in detail the reference to Don Quixote and the windmills and how it fits Cyrano’s character and situation at this point of the play. (74)
8. How does Le Bret know what is really on Cyrano’s mind during the long speech about poetry (75-77)?
9. The stage direction (86) says that Cy­rano “changes tone.” From what tone to what, and why?
10. Give the precise sources of the allusions in the mentions of “render[ing] to Cæsar” (76) and “the other [nostril]” (87).

### Act 3

## Two notes

the Marais—one of the oldest parts of Paris, on the right bank of the Seine, north of the current City Hall

Arras—once the capital of Artois, now of the department of Pas-de-Calais, 175 km. north of Paris. Louis XIII won it away from the Spanish in 1640.

## References and allusions

Mars (89)

Apollo

\*Gassendi (90)

Hercules (105)

Diogenes (112)

Lazarus (114)

Great Bear (121)

Scorpion

Balances

Sirius (122)

Diana (124)

## Some more questions

1. What has happened to Rageuneau that Cyrano has had to rescue him? Why? What is Rageuneau’s job now?
2. Explain Rageuneau’s line, “Mars ate up all the cakes Apollo left.” (89)
3. When Roxanne learns the Guard has been ordered to the front, what stratagem does she use to keep Christian in Paris?
4. What historical figure is recalled in the line, “Strong enough… at birth… to strangle those / Two serpents”? (106)
5. Explain fully the reference in Cyrano’s line, “What is this new game of Diogenes” (112).
6. How accurately does Roxanne read de Guiche’s letter to the Capuchin? How does Rostand give the audience the letter’s true contents?
7. What tale does Cyrano invent to stall de Guiche at Roxanne’s door?
8. What joke lies in de Guiche’s line, “you must not fail to write that book some day!” and Cyrano’s reply, “sir, I engage myself to do so.”? (126)
9. How does de Guiche block the consummation of the marriage?
10. Cyrano continues to move off, taking Christian with him, during Roxanne’s pleas. Why does he stop before his final line of the act? (128)

## Some general questions to discuss

* 1. What relationships, characterizations, and bases for action are set forth before the “play” begins?
  2. What is Cyrano’s image of himself? What illusions does he have about himself? As an old man, what qualities has he kept? Does he still have any illusions?
  3. How does Cyrano see himself in relation to the time and society in which he lives?
  4. What are the functions of the humor in the play?
  5. To what extent does the play demonstrate conflict between the individual and society? What is the nature of that conflict?
  6. Is Cyrano victorious or undefeated?
  7. Cyrano’s famous “nose speech” has been called a demonstration of “wit without malice.” Is it?
  8. Is the play emotional and dramatic or melodramatic?
  9. Is *Cyrano de Bergerac* realistic or romantic? In general, is there any realism in romanticism? any romanticism in realism?
  10. What methods of doing battle with society does *Cyrano de Bergerac* illustrate? withdrawal? patience? others?