

Cyrano de Bergerac's *L'Autre Monde* and Rostand's Socratic Cyrano

The eponymous character in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897), although based to a considerable degree on the historical soldier, litterateur and philosopher Hercule-Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-55), is most likely the product of an eclectic approach. Scholars have suggested as influences, among others, Beaumarchais' Figaro (*Marriage of Figaro*), Hugo's Don Cesar de Bazan (*Ruy Blas*), Dumas' D'Artagnan (*Three Musketeers*) and even Cervantes' Don Quixote (*Don Quixote*). I contend that there is another important source of influence for the portrait of Cyrano, a figure who is actually mentioned in the play itself, the Athenian philosopher Socrates. Rostand's Cyrano echoes him, as he is depicted in Plato's works, especially the *Apology* and the *Symposium*. The numerous similarities between the two are in fact reinforced by the overall conceptual frame of the play, which, with its emphasis on transcendental love and the transition from the carnal to the spiritual, is conspicuously Platonic. Rostand knew Plato's works and consciously brought to center stage the Socratic aspects of Cyrano's personality, altering reality when necessary by favoring the traits that conform to those of the ancient philosopher, while suppressing others. This connection was probably inspired by Hercule-Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac's novel *L'Autre Monde ou Les États et Empires de la Lune* (1657), in which the author relates in the first person a visit to the moon; his guide there is none other than the "demon of Socrates", who provides sage commentary on things earthly and lunar. By having his dying Cyrano state that he will find Socrates again on the moon (Act 5, sc. 6), Rostand not only gives a wink to the erudite reader, familiar with the historical Cyrano's fictional trip to the moon and his encounter with Socrates' voice of conscience, but also affirms an intimate connection between two kindred spirits. By depicting Cyrano in Socratic terms Rostand affectionately pays his character the ultimate tribute.