

Timeline: France Between Cyrano (1619–1655) and Rostand (1868–1918)

1. The Reign of Louis XIII and the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)

When the historical Cyrano de Bergerac lived, France was under Louis XIII and the powerful Cardinal Richelieu. The country was emerging from the religious wars between Catholics and Huguenots, and Richelieu centralized royal power by weakening the nobility and suppressing dissent. France entered the Thirty Years' War in 1635, helping to establish its dominance in Europe. This era's rigid hierarchies and ideals of honor deeply shaped the romanticized image of the Gascon soldier that Rostand would later revive in *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

2. Louis XIV and the Age of Absolutism (1643–1715)

After Louis XIII's death, his son Louis XIV, the "Sun King," ascended the throne. His long reign established the model of absolute monarchy. The splendor of Versailles contrasted sharply with the poverty of commoners. This culture of appearances and flattery foreshadows the world Cyrano defies—one where genuine virtue is subordinated to courtly show. For Rostand, looking back, this period symbolized both the grandeur and vanity of France's aristocratic past.

3. The Enlightenment and the Erosion of Monarchy (18th Century)

Philosophers like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot began to challenge absolute authority and religious orthodoxy. Their calls for liberty, equality, and fraternity planted the seeds for revolution. French culture became a battleground between faith and reason, sentiment and cynicism—tensions Rostand would later explore through Cyrano's idealism clashing with worldly pragmatism.

4. The French Revolution (1789–1799)

The Revolution toppled the monarchy, executed Louis XVI, and unleashed both democratic fervor and terror. The ideals of equality and national pride replaced aristocratic privilege. Yet the excesses of the Revolution also brought disillusionment. Rostand, writing a century later, saw this as a loss of chivalric virtue and individual heroism—values he resurrected through Cyrano's gallantry and self-sacrifice.

5. Napoleon and the Rise of French Nationalism (1799–1815)

Napoleon Bonaparte restored order after the Revolution, crowning himself Emperor in 1804. His conquests spread revolutionary ideals across Europe while reinstating autocratic control. Nationalism became a defining force in French identity. In Rostand's time, this patriotic spirit remained powerful—*Cyrano de Bergerac* evokes the courage and pride of an older France that many felt was slipping away.

6. The July Monarchy and Industrial Modernization (1830–1848)

The overthrow of the Bourbon king Charles X led to the "July Monarchy" under Louis-Philippe, the so-called "Citizen King." France embraced early capitalism and urbanization. Writers like Victor Hugo and Balzac

chronicled the tensions between romantic idealism and material progress. Rostand inherited this conflict: his *Cyrano* is a man out of step with a world driven by utility rather than beauty.

7. The Second Republic and the Rise of Napoleon III (1848–1870)

The 1848 Revolution established the short-lived Second Republic, granting universal male suffrage and promising social reform. But instability soon led to Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's coup in 1851 and the creation of the Second Empire. Under Napoleon III, Paris underwent massive renovation—Haussmann's boulevards and cafés reflected a society obsessed with display and modernity, themes Rostand's fin-de-siècle audience knew well.

8. The Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune (1870–1871)

France's humiliating defeat by Prussia ended Napoleon III's rule and led to the brief, bloody uprising of the Paris Commune. The loss of Alsace-Lorraine scarred national pride. In this aftermath, writers turned to nostalgia and heroism. Rostand's *Cyrano* emerged from this longing—a patriotic myth of courage and moral integrity amid modern disillusionment.

9. The Belle Époque and the Dreyfus Affair (1871–1914)

The Belle Époque was a period of optimism, artistic innovation, and technological progress. Paris thrived as a cultural capital—home to Impressionism, Art Nouveau, and Symbolist poetry. Yet beneath the glitter lay political tension, epitomized by the Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906), when a Jewish army officer was wrongfully accused of treason. The scandal exposed France's deep divisions over nationalism, justice, and identity. Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897), with its idealism and defense of personal honor, resonated powerfully amid that climate.

10. Toward the Great War (1914–1918)

As Europe drifted toward World War I, the idealism of *Cyrano* came to seem prophetic. Rostand's hero embodied the noble but doomed virtues of pre-modern France—courage, wit, and devotion to beauty. The war that followed would destroy much of that old world, marking the end of the Belle Époque and the romantic spirit that *Cyrano de Bergerac* so passionately celebrated.