

"ROSTAND, EDMOND.

**Cyrano de Bergerac. Comédie héroïque en cinq actes en vers.
Représentée à Paris, sur le Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, le
28 décembre 1897. 136e mille. - [""ONE OF THE CENTURY'S
GREATEST SMASH HITS""]**

Reference: 42164

Paris, 1898. 8vo. Contemporary half calf with five raised bands, gilt spine. Single gilt lines to boards. Capitals and corners worn. Inner hinges a bit weak. With Eugen Zabel's book plate to inside of front board, a postcard depicting Edmond Rostand's residence at Cambo, obviously posttamped on verso, pasted on to front free end-paper, contemporary newspaper-clipping about the numerous performances of ""Cyrano von Bergerac"" around the world pasted in to hinge of fly-leaf, where the presentation-inscription (for Eugène Zabel) is written, and finally, the original handwritten address in Rostand's hand, cut out from the envelope in which the book was sent to Zabel, is pasted into hinge of half-title. Internally nice and clean.

Comment: First edition, 136th thousand (same year as the first), presentation-copy ""à M. Eugène Zabel/ très cordial envoi, -/ remerciement, -/ et sympathie./ Edmond Rostand/ Octobre 98"" of Rostand's masterpiece, which against all odds became one of the most popular plays of the century and an overnight success throughout Europe. At the end of the 19th century in France, as well as in the rest of Europe, the industrialization was the force that dominated almost all aspects of society, i.e. everything from politics and sociology to science, art, philosophy, etc. And thus, also literature and theatre in this period were products of this new power. This meant that the trend that became prevailing within literature and drama was that of realism, which in France soon developed into naturalism. In the midst of this all-encompassing emphasis on objective documentation of everyday life which rejected romance, idealization and dreaming of any kind, emerged suddenly a work that no one could believe would have any success whatsoever, but which against all odds became the hugest dramaturgical success of the period and a theatrical monument that has been remembered ever since and which still stands as thus: Rostand's ""Cyrano de Bergerac"", the unlikely play about romantic heroes, fairy-tale like maidens, medieval-inspired sword-fights, about poetry, love, and art. The play had been taken on already in 1897, when the manuscript was finished, but the directors of the theatre regretted their decision immediately, not least due to the public reaction to the ""outdated"" romantic comedy-drama, which nobody would want to go see, and thus they severely cut the budget so that Rostand had to pay for all the costumes himself. Even the actor playing the main part, a leading actor at the time, regretted having taken the part, and Rostand is reported to have apologized to him for involving him in this ""disastrous adventure"". ""Therefore, when the curtain rose on ""Cyrano de Bergerac"" for the first time on December 28, 1897, expectations were low. The audience, however, was about to be pleasantly surprised. From the hero's last first majestic entrance to his last farewell, he transfixed his viewers. Theatergoers cheered Cyrano's triumphs, sighed at his suffering, laughed at his witty wordplay, and cried as his fate became known. A full hour after the curtain fell, the audience was still applauding thunderously. It is not easy to explain why Rostand's play confounded everyone by becoming one of the century's greatest smash hits. Perhaps the answer lies in ""Cyrano de Bergerac's"" stark contrast to the grimly realistic plays of its day, which often focused on modern society's darkest problems. The figure of the swashbuckling Cyrano dueling his way across the stage and stunning his compatriots with his verbal cleverness took Paris by storm. In fact, many critics, both of Rostand's time and later, attributed the play's tremendous success to its romanticism, or emphasis on idealism and heroism."" (Glencoe Literature Library, Study Guide for Cyrano de Bergerac). The work immediately became a huge success and within a very short amount of time, it had been translated into almost all

European languages and was performed at theatres throughout Europe. Eugen Zabel was a famous literary critic and author, who at the time of ""Cyrano de Bergerac"" was editor of the ""Nationalzeitung"". He was born in Königsberg in 1851 and died in Berlin in 1925. In his youth he wrote poems, and after his move to Berlin, he worked as a journalist, critic, and writer. He did a lot of work on Russian themes, both political, historical, topographical, and literary, and he became closely connected to the country. He was highly respected for his literary criticism and his opinions, though often controversial, played an important role in public opinion.

Year 1898

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