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Due: 1 June 2004

THE PROMPT

Write about one of the *Cyrano de Bergerac* quotes given out in class Thursday. You may write about more than one if you wish.

THE JOURNAL ENTRY

The version of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* from which I took my quote was translated by Gladys Thomas and Mary F. Guillemard; I found it online within the Project Gutenberg website (<http://www.gutenberg.net/>). It was not the translation we read in class, but it seemed quite well written nevertheless. I chose a passage from Act 1, Scene IV, in which Cyrano argues with "The Bore" over the length of his nose. After the desperate Bore calls Cyrano's nose "small, quite small—minute!" Cyrano fumes at the poor man:

'Tis enormous!
Old Flathead, empty-headed meddler, know
That I am proud possessing such appendice.
'Tis well known, a big nose is indicative
Of a soul affable, and kind, and courteous,
Liberal, brave, just like myself, and such
As you can never dare to dream yourself,
Rascal contemptible! For that witless face
That my hand soon will come to cuff—is all
As empty. . . [...]
—of pride, of aspiration,
Of feeling, poetry—of godlike spark
Of all that appertains to my big nose,
As. . . what my boot will shortly come and kick!

It is ironic that Cyrano calls himself “affable, and kind, and courteous” at the very moment he is punching and kicking someone and hurling cruel invectives. Cyrano’s perception of himself as a noble and righteous man at the same time that he is nasty, insulting, and gratuitously abusive to those he meets is, I find, one of the most aggravating and dislikable aspects of his personality.

Yet, however hypocritical he may have been when he uttered it, Cyrano’s statement contains a large degree of truth. The “big nose” of which Cyrano speaks should not be interpreted in the literal, physiological sense. Rather, it should be understood to mean those hardships which arise from the possession of such an “appendice,” namely teasing, social rejection, and—in Cyrano’s case—the inability to attract women. A person with a large nose understands how it feels to be mocked and disrespected, and it is this understanding that should (theoretically) cause the person to act with kindness and courtesy. A person with a large nose has had to learn to defend himself or herself, instilling a degree of bravery and pride that would not have otherwise existed. A person with a large nose has sunken to the lowest depths of despair but has also risen to the greatest levels of joy, for it is only by enduring pain or anger or sadness that one can feel comfort or sympathy or happiness. Such breadth of emotion imbues one’s soul with “feeling, poetry,” with the ability to see each day not as one more dull, monochromatic experience but as a series of lively, colorful events—whether painful or joyous.

It is unfortunate that Cyrano does not display many of the positive qualities that he professes to have. Perhaps the hardship of wearing an enormous nose has been outweighed by other, enviable characteristics: consummate swordsmanship and eloquence, for instance. Yet, Cyrano’s distress at being unable to woo Roxane is one time when his pride is challenged. And, one might argue—based on Cyrano’s

respect toward Christian, in spite of his envy—that it was precisely when Cyrano was humbled that he acted with greatest nobility.