

Student Name

Professor Marchbanks

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### A Great Deal of Noise

Love, by the Biblical definition, "does not boast, it is not proud " (1 Cor. 13:4-5, NIV). Yet pride appears inevitable—any job well done, any thought cleverly put, indeed, any good, moral action taken seems soon followed by a pleasant feeling for oneself (for the purposes of this paper, *pride* refers to *pride for the self*). Is one really only a "resounding gong or a clanging cymbal," does one truly "gain nothing" if one feels pride? In some way, each character in James Joyce's "Grace" (1914), "A Mother" (1914), and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917), Lars Von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), and Salvador Dalí's *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937) confronts this question, and the answer they give us is, with a few significant exceptions, "yes." What did Narcissus' self-obsession get him? A small flower held up by a petrified hand, soon to be devoured by the ants crawling up towards it. What did *Dogville*'s unyielding proud (and unarguably wrong) belief that they are "good honest folks" bring (*Dogville* chp. 1)? Ultimately, its own destruction. But pride is not always just self-destructive: what good did Tom Kernan's self-deluding pride do for the well-being of his family? What did Mrs. Kearney's well-intentioned but nonetheless proud actions do for Ireland and, more personally, her daughter? Still, there is the exception: Stephen's "too powerful...pride" which compels him to leave Ireland yet ultimately for his benefit (*Portrait* 203). Did pride save him, or was it something else? Nevertheless, by illustrating the crippling and sometimes destructive nature of pride through

their characters, Joyce, Trier, and Dalí confirm the Biblical principle of love without pride as the only meaningful way of prospering both as an individual and as a collective.

One of the most common symptoms of pride is self-delusion. This is because pride, being self-centered, builds itself on self-worth, yet self-worth can be a fragile thing. Tom's self-worth, built on his "silk hat...and a pair of gaiters," his "[carrying] on the tradition of...the great Blackwhite," and his attempt to pass himself off as a tea connoisseur, faces a crisis which promises to destroy it (Grace 139). To maintain itself, his pride obscures or completely avoids the facts. He looks at his friends "a little proudly, with a veteran's pride," as if the wounds from his drunken fall are akin to a soldier's received in service of his country (142). He tries to keep the more embarrassing "details of the incident...vague," such as his interaction with Mr. Harford, and his laughable charlatan friends for the most part comply (145). However, the task of protecting his ego distracts from the actual problem of his situation—his alcoholism. Trite though it is, it is nonetheless true that in order to fix a problem, one must admit they have a problem. Jack Mckay, whose vanity concerning his blindness leads him to "hide it by never leaving his house," could not fix the problem of his lack of a "partner for conversation" (as the narrator so quaintly terms his loneliness) until he admitted he was blind to Grace (Dogville chp. 3, chp. 6). Whether Grace confronted Jack out of love or not (this will be addressed later), the experience is constructive for Jack rather than—as perhaps he had feared—deconstructive; indeed, he seems to feel so improved from before that he openly credits Grace with "[making] Dogville a wonderful place to live in" (chp. 10). It is certain, though, that pride cannot "[build] up," only "[puff] up" (1 Cor. 8:1b). Tom Kernan's pride cannot be constructive; it can only enable his self-destructive behavior.

Whether gradually or all at once, the self-destructive nature of pride often deflates the quality or qualities the characters boast in. In *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, heavily implied to be masturbating, Narcissus sits in the water staring at himself, perhaps specifically his penis, with one arm hidden by his leg. A hand which mirrors him holds up the legacy to his beauty—a small narcissus flower poking out of an egg—and further suggests masturbation. It also embodies Narcissus' masturbatory self-obsession. Narcissus admires his beauty, but his beauty, like the flower, is short-lived—he eventually dies, and the flower, whether consumed by age or ants, will die as well. This leaves only the ugly, gray, and cracking hand as a monument to him, overshadowing the memory of his beauty. In this sense, Narcissus' own vanity deflates his beauty. Mrs. Kearney's deflation is similar. Set in the context of the Irish Revival, she refuses to let her daughter perform until Mr. Holohan pays up (Mother 132). The money itself is not an issue; after all, she and her husband have enough to invest in their daughter's dowries, to afford getting her daughter Kathleen a good education, and to go vacationing as a family "for a few weeks...every year in the month of July" (124). She tries defending her actions as insuring "her daughter gets her rights" and her money, yet this also seems a non-issue, especially considering Mrs. Kearney on two occasions respectively refers to the contract and the rights as "*my contract*" and "*my rights*" (131, 134-135, emphasis mine). The actual motivation seems to be mending her hurt ego by showing the concert organizers, Mr. Holohan especially, "their mistake" in treating her the way they did (134). This in itself is not a bad thing; indeed, to "rebuke" them is the moral thing to do (Luke 17:3). The concert organizers have treated her condescendingly and deserve to be held accountable for it, but Mrs. Kearney greatly oversteps her moral duty. By impeding the concert, she essentially claims her grievance is more important than the concert itself—both the performers involved and the cause it is connected to—an exaggeration by any

means. Apparently unaware of the hypocrisy, she then behaves condescendingly to Mr. Holohan, and soon after, her arrogant conduct is "condemned on all hands," awarding her the opposite of what she aimed for—respect (135). Her puffed-up self-importance only succeeds at deflating whatever respect they did have for her.

Unfortunately, the consequences of pride's self-delusional nature do not only affect the self. Mrs. Kearney's actions, as one character claims, have "ended" her daughter Kathleen's "musical career...in Dublin" (133). Though perhaps an exaggeration, undoubtedly Kathleen's chances of getting back onstage are greatly impaired as long as her mother is in the picture. Similarly, Tom Kernan's alcoholism, enabled by his pride, acts as a drain on his family's finances and reputation. Both are shown through implications: his sons "sometimes sent home money," and he admits to having been with Mr. Harford at the bar, a notorious moneylender who is only spoken ill of when he had "smarted" someone, though he purposely keeps the "details [of his interaction with Harford] vague" (Grace 142, 145). In terms of reputation, a parallel between Mr. Cunningham's "unpresentable...incurable drunkard" of a wife and Tom himself and Power's surprise "at [Tom's children's] manners and...accents"—something one would only notice if they are unexpectedly lower class—suggest a depreciation of the family's prestige (140, 142). Yet Tom seems unaware of the kind of drain he is, or if he is aware, he shows no concern about it. Indeed, neither Tom nor Mrs. Kearney seem to consider how their actions affect others—their pride cripples their ability to empathize. Such a lack of empathy can become dangerous, as it does with Grace. Even after telling the townspeople "the truth"—a daily routine of abuse and rape committed by them against her—Dogville's pride is so great that they feel absolutely no empathy for Grace; in fact, they actually believe *they* are the victims. "She's been managed to spread bitterness and trouble throughout this whole town," Jack McKay passionately declares,

apparently blind to the self-contradiction of his earlier glowing praise (Dogville chp. 16). At the very least, empathy is necessary to maintain civility between people. How can pride then possibly be constructive, enabling some of the worst, most sickening actions people can commit against another?

Yet Stephen's case seems to show that pride *can* be constructive. Stephen is asked again and again "to be one of us," to join the Irish Cause, and each time he refuses, eventually leading to a optimistic exodus from Ireland, a chance "to forge...in [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (Portrait 203, 253). His fellow Irishmen attribute the persistent refusal to his being "wrapped up in [himself]," his sense of intellectual superiority, his insensitivity to his fellow human being—essentially, his "too powerful...pride" (177, 197, 199, 203). However, Stephen's perspective on his refusal is a much more practical one. From all he has seen of Ireland—the Irish clergy's abandonment of Parnell, the "bloody good honest Irishmen" of his father's generation who did more to keep themselves entertained than to help Ireland, the "droll" and "tawdry tribute[s]" the Irish give their national poets and heroes, even himself—nothing tells him that supporting Ireland with his "own life and person" would not be in vain (38, 91, 180, 184, 203). "No honourable and sincere man," he tells his friend Davin, "has given up to [Ireland] his life and his youth and his affections" without the country turning its back on him (203). His refusal is therefore not an act of pride but, in a sense, the opposite—a realistic and humble acknowledgement that he cannot fix Ireland, especially not while it is steeped in a culture so quick to turn on its own. Likewise, his exodus is also a realistic and humble acknowledgement that if he stays, Ireland will somehow further cripple or destroy his artistic ambitions and his spirit. Stephen cannot be faulted for this just as much as Jesus cannot be faulted for telling Peter to "get behind [him]" because he is "a stumbling block" (Matt 16:23). If staying in Ireland

impedes not only his growth as an artist but also his ability to learn "what the heart is and what it feels" (such as love), then he is more than justified in leaving (Portrait 252). In other words, avoiding anything which will inevitably stunt the growth of love or the emotional or spiritual self-development necessary to love another is neither selfish or proud.

As Stephen's case shows, it is difficult sometimes to tell what is done out of pride, out of love, or out of something else entirely. Mr. Cunningham, respected, even somewhat worshipped, for being "well informed," comically tells falsehood after falsehood about religion, but it is unclear if he does it solely to "[build] up the vast image of the Church" in order to convince Tom Kernan to come to a retreat or to also build up his own image as a knowledgeable man (Grace 143, 154). Likewise, it is not clear what drives Grace's "pretty shady piece of provocation" with Jack McKay (*Dogville* chp. 6). Yet Grace successfully "builds up" Jack while Mr. Cunningham, by several suggestions of the story, fails to do Tom any good, and the reason is love (1 Cor. 8:1b). Grace may have "indulged" in provoking Jack, but was it for her sake (chp. 6)? It seems extremely unlikely. Rather than feeling proud of what she just did, she feels contrite. Furthermore, with the town's vote coming up, she certainly must have broken some unwritten rule of campaigning to not point out the flaws or delusions of those who are voting. Grace's "provocation" is not the kind of action that wins friends, but it is the kind one does with friends and those one loves, like a parent giving medicine to the child "who doesn't want to take [it]" (*Dogville* chp. 16). It is not easy, and that is the point. Building up is hard work and requires effort equal to its difficulty, an effort which will sometimes take the form of challenging and reproving. "If your brother sins, rebuke him," even if it is a difficult task, for letting one continue in sin is worse (Luke 17:3). This is why Mr. Cunningham fails—he does not rebuke. Mr. Cunningham is about as non-confrontational a friend one could find—the harshest reproof

he gives to Tom is a vague invitation to "wash the pot together" (Grace 148). However, Mrs. Kernan perceives the strategy's ineffectiveness. "Religion...would not change greatly" Tom's behavior, especially since the Church is as equally non-confrontational as Cunningham; indeed, all Cunningham really succeeds in doing is pushing the problem onto someone else (143). If the goal was truly to "make a new man of [Tom]," the entire group, not just Cunningham, would have explicitly confronted Tom's alcoholism (141). Instead, they reap the rewards of their plan's "success" while Tom goes on, unchanged.

In some way, pride has failed each character. Where the Irish need unity, it divides; where Mr. Kernan needs self-awareness, it blinds; where Dogville and Narcissus need perspective, it narrows their vision. Where they each need to show love to one another, pride enters, hampering, deluding, and wrecking. It makes a great deal of noise, but in the end, after the plans fall through, after the ambitions crumble, after compassion and morality get trampled over, it is only noise. "What they had done was not good enough" are a few of the last words said about Dogville, but they could easily be a few of the last words said about pride (Dogville chp. 19). Pride—Dogville's pride, Narcissus' pride, Mr. Kernan's and Mrs. Kearney's pride—is not good enough. It cannot build up, it cannot save, it can only clang, and eventually, the noise it makes will fade away.

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