

Hubris

Hubris Definition

Hubris is extreme pride and arrogance shown by a [character](#), which ultimately brings about his downfall.

Hubris is a typical flaw in the personality of a character who enjoys a powerful position; as a result of which, he overestimates his capabilities to such an extent that he loses [contact](#) with reality. A character suffering from hubris tries to cross normal human limits, and violates [moral](#) codes. Examples of hubris are found in major characters of tragic plays.

Definition of Hubris by Aristotle

Aristotle mentions hubris in his book [Rhetoric](#):

“Hubris consists in doing and saying things that cause shame to the victim ... simply for the pleasure of it. Retaliation is not hubris, but revenge. ... Young men and the rich are hubristic because they think they are better than other people.”

Aristotle believed that people indulge in crimes. like sexual misconduct and maltreating others. only to fulfill their basic desire to make themselves feel superior to others.

The Concept of Hubris in Greek Mythology

Similarly, Greek mythology depicts hubris as a great crime that demands a severe punishment. Generally, the Greek idea of hubris is that a character in an authoritative position becomes so proud of his exceptional qualities that he forms a delusion that he is equal to gods, and eventually he tries to defy the gods and his fate.

Examples of Hubris in Literature

Hubris examples are also examples of “[hamartia](#),” a [tragic flaw](#) in a character that brings about his tragic downfall.

Example #1: *Oedipus Rex* (By Sophocles)

In the famous Greek [tragedy](#) *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles, the character of King Oedipus provides a classic example of a character who suffers from hubris, or excessive pride. Due to his hubris, he attempts to defy prophecies of gods, but ended up doing what he feared the most, and what he was warned against. The Oracle of Delphi told him that he would kill his father and marry his mother.

Overcome by hubris, Oedipus tries to avoid this by leaving Corinth, traveling toward Thebes. On his way to the neighboring city, he kills an old man in a feud, and later marries the queen of Thebes, as he was made king of the city after he saved the city from a deadly sphinx. One can say that he commits all these sins in complete ignorance, but nevertheless he deserves punishment because he became so proud that he does not shy from attempting to rebel against his fate. His reversal of fortune is caused by his hubris.

Example #2: *Paradise Lost* (By John Milton)

In his famous epic *Paradise Lost*, John Milton portrays Satan as a character that suffers from hubris. He loses his glorious position through giving in to his excessive pride. It was his hubris that made him try to take control over Heaven. Although he failed miserably, his pride lasts:

“Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n.”

The reason of his desire to rebel against his creator originates from his reluctance to accept the authority of God and His Son because he believed that angels are “self-begot, self-raised” and hence bringing his downfall in being thrown out of Paradise.

Example #3: *Doctor Faustus* (By Christopher Marlowe)

An instance of hubris can be spotted in Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus". Faustus's arrogance and extreme pride in his scholarship and his irresistible desire to become superior to all other men of his age forces him to sell his soul to "Lucifer" by signing a contract with his blood. He learns the art of black magic and defies Christianity. Finally, he has to pay for his arrogance and pride. The devils take away his soul to Hell and he suffers eternal damnation.

Example #4: *Frankenstein* (By Mary Shelley)

Likewise, "Victor" the [protagonist](#) of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" exhibits hubris in his endeavor to become an unmatched scientist. He creates a "monster" named "Frankenstein" which ultimately becomes the cause of his disaster.

Function of Hubris

In literature, portrayal of hubristic characters serves to achieve a moralistic end. Such characters are eventually punished thus giving a moral lesson to the [audience](#) and the readers so that they are motivated to improve their characters by removing the flaws that can cause a tragedy in their lives. Witnessing a [tragic hero](#) suffering due to his hubristic actions, the audience or the readers may fear that the same fate may befall them if they indulge in similar kinds of actions.