

**Hubris in Shakespearean Tragedies****Dr. Deen Dayal**

Asst. Prof. of English, LSSSS Govt. P.G. College, Mant, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India

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**Abstract**

Shakespeare's tragedies involve **hubris** (excessive pride or over self-confidence). Most of Shakespeare's plays are manifestations of hubris, such as *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the main protagonist or hero shows excessive pride or overconfidence. In *Othello*, Othello is the main protagonist. In *Macbeth*, Macbeth is the hero. In *King Lear*, the tragic hero is undoubtedly the title character, King Lear. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is widely considered the tragic hero due to his noble character and internal conflict that causes his fatal flaw. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo is considered the tragic hero as he displays excessive pride and self-confidence. He believes he can defy fate, which leads to his downfall. Hubris in literature is excessive pride that leads someone to act foolishly or rashly. It occurs when a person possesses power or comes into power, leading him to overestimate his self-capabilities and capacities.

**Keywords:** Hubris; Shakespearean Tragedies; Tragic Hero; Excessive Pride; Downfall**Hubris**

Hubris is a Greek-origin word derived from *Hybris*, meaning *wanton violence, insolence, outrage*. Originally, it meant *presumption toward gods*. Hubris means somebody being too proud.

**Note:** A character with extreme pride or hubris often dies because he ignores warnings. Hubris means exaggerated pride or self-confidence. In Classical Greek tragedies, hubris was a fatal shortcoming that brought about the fall of the tragic hero. Overconfidence leads a hero to overstep the boundaries of human limitations.

Hubris is the intentional use of violence to humiliate or degrade someone. It denotes extreme or excessive pride or too much self-confidence mixed with arrogance.

Macbeth's hubris (excessive pride) is shown in his belief in the witches' prophecies:

"None of woman born shall harm Macbeth" (Act 5, Scene 7).

Hubris shows excessive pride and self-confidence. The fact that a character dies after ignoring warnings is a key trait of hubris. Hubris is the characteristic of excessive confidence or ignorance that leads a person to think he can do no wrong, causing a flaw in his character. It is a negative character trait.

Hubris in tragedy refers to overweening pride or pride that often comes before the fall, leading to serious consequences. Macbeth's hubris (overweening ambition) is shown when he says:

"I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
And falls on the other" (Act 1, Scene 7).

Hubris is a character's tragic flaw. If any character has too much pride and arrogance, it is called hubris. It is an extreme expression of pride or self-confidence. The protagonist violates moral law and disregards divine warning due to excessive pride and overconfidence. It is commonly exhibited by a tragic hero due to his tragic flaw or *hamartia*. Hubris often consumes a character and causes his ultimate downfall by blinding his ability to think and reason. According to Aristotle, the source of this trait was disrespect toward others.

In Greek tragedies, many characters demonstrate hubris and face serious consequences and downfall. Some common examples include Oedipus, Icarus, Ajax, and Antigone.

### **Hubris in Fictional Characters**

Hubris is a literary device applied to fictional characters whose arrogance and excessive pride lead them to negative consequences.

### **Examples of Fictional Characters Exhibiting Hubris**

1. Willie Stark – *All the King's Men* (1946) by Robert Penn Warren

2. Victor Frankenstein – *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley
3. Doctor Faustus – *Doctor Faustus* (1604) by Christopher Marlowe
4. Blanche Dubois – *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) by Tennessee Williams
5. Scarlett O’Hara – *Gone with the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell
6. Gaston – *Beauty and the Beast* (1740) by Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve
7. Jay Gatsby – *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald
8. Prince Humperdinck – *The Princess Bride* (1973) by William Goldman
9. Emma Bovary – *Madame Bovary* (1856) by Gustave Flaubert

## **Other Examples of Hubris in Literature**

### **1.Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1604)**

“O, what a world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence...”

Faustus’s excessive pride and self-confidence lead to his downfall.

### **2.The Tortoise and the Hare**

The hare’s excessive pride in his speed leads him to nap during the race, resulting in humiliation and defeat.

### **3.Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex***

Oedipus defies the gods and is overconfident in his identity and power.

“Here I am myself—  
You all know me, the world knows of my fame:  
I am Oedipus.”

### **4.Ovid’s *The Fall of Icarus***

Ignoring his father’s warning, Icarus flies too high; the sun melts his wings, causing his death.

### **5.Homer’s *Iliad***

Achilles’ pride prevents reconciliation, leading to tragic consequences.

“Beg no more, you fawning dog...”

**6.Beowulf**

Beowulf's youthful overconfidence and thirst for glory lead him to fight the dragon alone, resulting in his death.

**7.Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales***

Chanticleer's pride makes him vulnerable to flattery, leading to danger.

**8.Milton's *Paradise Lost***

Satan's excessive pride and ambition lead to his fall from Heaven.

**9.Shakespeare's *Macbeth***

Macbeth's faith in the witches' prophecies makes him reckless:

"Swords I smile at..."

**10.Shakespeare's *Othello***

Othello's hubris leads him to act as a judge of heaven, rejecting Desdemona's innocence until it is too late.

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