

potion each evening, so for the first two nights he sleeps through the heroine's entreaties. The third night, sensing that something is amiss, the prince only pretends to consume the drink offered to him by his fiancée, hears the heroine's pleas, comes to accept her as his only legitimate wife, and the two of them live happily ever after.

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Reversal of Fortune

Pride Brought Low

Motifs L400–L499



In the *Motif-Index*, Pride Brought Low is a subdivision of Chapter L, Reversal of Fortune. The most direct and accessible phrase identifying this motif is “pride humbled,” a condition often colloquially described in the United States as being “cut down to size” or “falling (or being knocked) off a high horse.” The impressive number of idioms and images devoted to this theme over the past millennia may be attributed to the fact that numerous people and cultures are repelled by displays of vanity and gratified by any comeuppance visited upon the proud.

Sometimes, however, pride is considered a virtue, especially when it is pride in something or someone else, pride in a country or in a friend, for example. Vaunting one’s own powers and feats was also considered an effective psychological weapon against adversaries in such cultures as the Anglo-Saxon, in which the gab or boast was part of a verbal display intended to intimidate the hero’s opponent. Beowulf’s account of the numerous monsters he slew during the days of his swimming match with Breca silences his detractor, Unferth. But even in those archaic societies that valued the efficacy of such verbal weapons, earnest (as opposed to pretended) pride earned a braggart the contempt of his fellows and punishment by either the gods or the force of fate. The same apparent paradox holds true today. Cheering squads at sporting events are expected to chant words that elevate their team and belittle their opponents. The victorious side is, nevertheless, expected to behave modestly and graciously at the end of the game.

The phrase “pride brought low” ignores the positive aspects of pride and hews to the more dominant tradition—that, since it is disproportionate vanity,

it must be leveled. Pride is usually condemned by both Eastern and Western religions, principally because it mocks the ultimate superiority of a deity or deities and ignores the relative insignificance of their mortal worshippers. The major Western traditions, whether Christian, Islamic, or Jewish, have often called pride "the root of all evil." In one paradigmatic medieval illustration, there are "two trees, the tree of vices springing from the root of pride and the tree of the virtues, springing from the root of humility" (Bloomfield 1967, 84). Judeo-Christian ethics usually identify pride as the first fault of humanity, and the tree of pride is called the "vetus (old) Adam" (Bloomfield 1967, 84). Although some early Fathers of the Church saw other sins, such as concupiscence and avarice, as the cause of man's first alienation from God, most Christian theologians maintained, as they still do today, that pride impelled Adam and Eve to disobey God's commandment. Their punishments for falling from God's grace included expulsion from the Garden of Eden and, ultimately, mortality, but common to all the punishments was a lowering of the malefactors' condition.

In the later schemes of sins and virtues, pride's presumption is punished by humiliation. In fact, humility is the virtue that, in most systems of sin and virtue, remedies pride. Considering the scope and power of these beliefs, it is not surprising to find that the folk motif of the child overcoming the giant is found in innumerable cultures and societies. David's defeat of Goliath is the most famous biblical example.

The image evoked by the expression "pride brought low" depends upon a standard verbal and visual iconography of pride. Pride is always depicted as large in length and breadth. Words characterizing pride include "big," "too big," "overblown," "inflated," "puffed-up," "swollen," "high," "uppity." Expressions containing images of pride almost always depend upon forms of these words, so that a proud man may be "too big for his britches" or "full of himself," and a proud person was conventionally shown riding a "high horse."

The genealogy of pride is easily traceable in Western texts. Hubris, the name of a mysterious nymph in Greek myth (Payne 1951, 5-8) known as "Wantonness," mother of Pan (Rose 1959, 168), came to signify, first, excess or imbalance. Later, it "grew into a religious conception too: it now meant, the aggrandizement of man against God" (Jaeger 1945, I:168). First displayed by the titans, especially Prometheus, hubris was the tragic flaw that most often caused the downfall of the hero in Greek tragedy. It was the human presumption that a mortal either knew better than the gods or could avoid the obligations due to or the fate determined by the gods. Euripides wrote, "He who transgresses through overweening pride /or brings upon himself treasures unjustly acquired, / For him there comes a time of retribution. / All is taken from him" (*Eumenides* 553 in Payne 1951, 22). The fall of pride is

graphically portrayed in the myth of Icarus, who flew so close to the sun that his wax wings melted and he fell to earth.

Among the images and sayings concerning the humbling of pride, the most familiar to Western readers are probably those in the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah 40:4, the major text of Handel's *Messiah*, proclaims the motif as the divine plan for the whole world as the Prophet promises, "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low." Proverbs 29:23 assures the faithful that "a man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." A formative Christian image of pride appears in the *Psychomachia*, or Battle within the Soul, the allegorical account of a battle between the vices and the virtues by the early fifth-century Spanish writer, Prudentius. Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, which inspired many other literary battles between the vices and virtues, portrayed Pride as a woman:

Galloping about, all puffed up on a mettled steed which she had covered with a lion's skin and from which she looked down on the columns with swelling disdain. High on her head she had piled a tower of braided hair to heighten her locks and make a lofty peak over her haughty brows.

(Prudentius 1949-1953 I:291-293)

Pride's mantle "billows" and her large horse "champs" at the bit (293). Pride finally falls "headlong into a pit which cunning Deceit had dug across the field" (297). Thus, the allegorical figure Pride literally "goes before a fall" or, as Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall." The *Psychomachia* heavily influenced portraits of vices and virtues on later Romanesque and Gothic churches. Of course, Prudentius's portrait was not entirely original, for he encapsulated archetypal features of pride he had gleaned from the Bible, from Greek and Roman literature, and from early battle images in sculpture and relief. In each of these instances, Pride personified or a proud person is punished by being "brought low," the literal meaning of humbled. An image of pride, based perhaps on a church carving (see Katzenellenbogen 1964, *passim*), perhaps on Prudentius, but most likely on a by now stereotypic verbal portrait of the sin, appears in Villard de Honnecourt's twelfth-century sketchbook on a leaf containing an equally standard depiction of humility. Above the drawing of a male figure, caught in his voluminously swirling cloak as he loses his stirrups and begins to fall from his horse, appear the words "How Pride Stumbles" (Villard 1959, 13). Other stone renderings of pride as a man falling off a horse may be found in Chartres and Conques (Bloomfield 1967, 199). Depictions of Pride as a vice are featured in all the major literary masterpieces summarizing the history of Creation and the scheme of salvation. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example, includes a list of famous figures who fell because of their pride (*Purgatorio* 14,

70 ff.). John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* leads every Christian through "the Valley of Humiliation" where he learns that, "He that is down needs fear no fall, / He that is low no pride" (Bunyan 1986, 212). But the most widely known literary portrait of pride is undoubtedly Milton's Satan, "who was by the command of God driven out of Heaven with all his Crew into the great Deep" (*Paradise Lost* I, "The Argument"). Milton's Satan has a venerable lineage (Bloomfield 1967, 109), for believers have always asserted that his pride was the original sin, since his fall from heaven preceded Adam's fall from grace and was thus the first Judeo-Christian example of pride brought low.

A Hasidic commentator summarizes the significance of the motif and illustrates some of the ways in which it forms a continuum between folk culture and religion. "Said the Kotsker: 'The Lord brings the proud low, but the man of pride remains haughty even in his lower state; once more the Lord lowers him, and this continues until he is humbled to the very earth'" (Newman 1975, 355).

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Ordaining the Future