

# Addressing hubris in jorge luis borges's the garden of forking paths

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According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Jorge Luis Borges was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on August 24, 1899 (“Jorge Luis Borges.”). During his life, Borges wrote many pieces of influential literature, one of which being the short story “The Garden of Forking Paths.” This story follows the narrative of a man named Yu Tsun, a professor of English and German spy during World War I (Borges 19). In his narrative, Yu Tsun tells of how he is on a mission to inform his chief of the location of a British artillery park, and deals with his struggle of how to accomplish this while at the same time evading capture by English spy Captain Richard Madden. Yu Tsun takes the reader through his day, beginning with a phone call from Captain Madden and ending with his own arrest and subsequent imprisonment. Along the way, Yu Tsun meets Stephen Albert, a man who knows many things about life and mystery, and kills him.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines hubris as “overbearing pride or presumption” or “arrogance” (“Hubris.”). In “The Garden of Forking Paths,” hubris plays a major part. Yu Tsun is, according to his own report, supposed to somehow find a way to tell only his chief where an artillery base is so they can bomb it; soon after the bombing, the site turns into a battleground. However, the location in question is featured prominently in a map of the area, and is really the only logical place for the artillery base to be located (Hart 230). Yu Tsun’s hubris prevents him seeing that he may not be as important as he believes, since the logical location is in plain sight.

Another way in which Yu Tsun shows his hubris is when he kills Stephen Albert. Yu Tsun believes killing a man with the same name as the location of the artillery base will somehow help, but there was surely a better way he

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could have gone about the whole situation. Yu Tsun was presumptuous and thought he had a right to life and deciding who could live and die. He may have been doing it for the greater good, but it turns out that he did not really do any good at all, and needlessly murdered an honorable man (Borges 29). Despite the fact that Stephen Albert unlocked the mystery of Yu Tsun's ancestor's novel and labyrinth, Yu Tsun decides that his chief does not possess the ability to read a map and thus will not know where the artillery base is located. Yu Tsun assumes he is the only one who possesses the secret of the location, showing his hubris yet again in his arrogance and belief that he is elite above all the other members in his organization.

At the beginning of "The Garden of Forking Paths," Borges cites a page number from a book and dates for a battle, all of which are incorrect. Throughout the story, Yu Tsun also makes many incorrect presumptions as well. Borges does this to emphasize one of the hallmarks of hubris: mistakes. Often, when one is arrogant, one tends to make many more mistakes than one would when humble. The mistakes in "The Garden of Forking Paths" remind one of the many mistakes made under the influence of hubris and serve as a kind of riddle, where the story's errors are the clues and hubris is the solution. While Yu Tsun and Stephen Albert are talking, they discuss the labyrinth of a novel Yu Tsun's ancestor left behind when he died. Albert points out that the whole story is a riddle, with time as the answer. Each possible scenario splits into every possible outcome, making the book essentially a jumbled mess to undiscerning readers. Each scenario splits in time, rather than space, making time the great riddle of the story, when it is not even mentioned once. In the story at hand, the riddle is about hubris.

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At the end of the story, Yu Tsun reads a newspaper article about the bombing of the artillery base. In the same issue of that newspaper, there is an article about the murder of Stephen Albert. Thus, Yu Tsun's efforts to convey the location of the base did no good, and Stephen Albert died in vain. This is one of the countless casualties of hubris. Thus, one must always be careful to not allow oneself to be caught up in one's own achievements or confidence, lest one becomes arrogant and causes harm to the surrounding people. One must always avoid the trap of hubris, no matter how tempting it is; in many cases, as in the case of Stephen Albert, it can be fatal.