

Beowulf's pride, good, bad, or both?

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Beowulf's Pride, Good, Bad, or Both? The hero has forever stood as a prime example of who we should be and who we should strive to become. However most stories which that have a hero tell the tale of how the hero overcame tribulation in his own life or perhaps within his own character to rise to the challenge set before him. So if a hero is who we should strive to be, which of the hero's flaws do we accept, or are his flaws simply something that helped him become the hero he is? Beowulf is one of the first epic stories of time which has been properly recorded and just like any other heroic ballad our hero is not perfect. From the onset of the story it is easy to see that Beowulf is a very hubris or prideful young man, but is that a good thing or does it hinder him in his quest? The story itself brings to light Beowulf's pridefulness when Healfdene's son Hrothgar warns Beowulf about being too prideful: "Pride overpowering gathers and grows! The warder slumbers, the guard of his spirit; Too sound is that sleep, too sluggish the weight Of worldly affairs, too pressing the Foe, The Archer who loses the arrows of sin". The older and wiser of the two men, the king is warning Beowulf that his hubris might be his downfall, like so many other young heroes. The fact that Christians were the ones to document this story also adds to the importance of humility, which is a strong Christian belief. When Beowulf first arrives, Queen Wealtheow thanks God for sending him to fight Grendel and wishes him luck. Beowulf replies boastfully that he will either distinguish himself with his heroic deed or die trying. We see here that he is so sure of himself that he is willing to literally bet his life on his skill as a warrior. This act of pride could bring him an untimely death. As night falls Beowulf readies for his fight against Grendel we see one of the most blatant acts of hubris on Beowulf's

part at this time, he decides against using armor or weapons to battle Grendel. His reasoning being that he considers himself to be as dangerous as Grendel. In this situation by being so prideful he is taking an unneeded risk, his pride and need to "showboat" are putting his life at higher risk than needed. Beowulf knows that no weapon could harm Grendel by surrendering his weapons and armor did he help himself by having realistic expectation of what he had to do or was he simply taking an unnecessary risk to make himself look better. After defeating Grendel's mother Hrothgar for the second time in the story warns Beowulf of the dangers of success and pride "Do not give way to pride. For a brief while your strength is in bloom but it fades quickly; and soon there will follow illness or the sword to lay you low". Hrothgar warns against perhaps missing future perils if his pride got in the way. Hrothfar also emphasized how short life is and how little time Beowulf has to be young, noting that "his blossom will fade quickly". His speech conveys that Beowulf must learn to be not just prideful but also honorable and a good leader because he will not always have his youth and brute strength to rely upon. Jump ahead Fifty years and Beowulf is ruling his own kingdom when a fierce dragon starts to plague his lands. Being the brave ruler of his lands Beowulf brings the task to kill the dragon upon himself. With age Beowulf has become known as a great leader to his people however his prideful streak is still fully intact. Being to prideful to assemble an army to battle the dragon he assembles only a few men in preparation for the battle. He reminisces back to his youth when he single handedly defeated Grendel this memory instills a fearlessness towards the dragon. However fifty years have passed since Beowulf's great defeat of Grendel and

Beowulf has aged considerably. The fight does not last long between Beowulf and the dragon with a little help from one of his men Beowulf does manage to slay the dragon however before he was able to kill the beast it delivered a deathly blow to Beowulf in the form of a venomous bite which proves to be fatal to the great warrior. As he dies he asked one of his men the only who stayed with him Wiglaf to fetch him some treasure so he might see what he won in his battle. Throughout the entirety of the poem we see Beowulf grow from a valiant but prideful young warrior to an old and wise leader of his people. In Beowulf's first two fights that with Grendel and Grendel's mother we see a young brash warrior confident in not only his abilities but also in the fact that he is indestructible. However in the last fight Beowulf is forced to come face to face with his mortality. We see the change in the character from the young warrior who had nothing to lose and everything to gain to the older wiser warrior who is still willing to put his life on the line for his people but is aware of his own mortality. While it is hard to say whether Beowulf's hubris helped or hurt him more during his life time in the end it did get him killed. By being too prideful to bring an army to battle the dragon he got himself killed. And by dying he left his kingdom open for attacks without a proper leader. While he was a good leader, in the end he put his pride before the welfare of his people.