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An Analysis of Moral Values in the Tale of the Three Brothers by J.K. Rowling

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Abstract
This study aims to identify, analyze, and categorize the moral values embedded within the characters' actions in J.K. Rowling's short story, The Tale of the Three Brothers, which is natively found within the novel Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Grounded in literary criticism, this research employs a descriptive qualitative method utilizing textual and content analysis techniques. The theoretical framework used to identify and distinguish the types of moral values is based on Hornby's (2010) classification of eleven moral values, supported by structural moral definitions from Syamaun et al. (2019) and character development principles from Bertens (1997). The findings reveal that out of Hornby's eleven categories, nine moral values are prominently present: bravery, humbleness, honesty, steadfastness, sympathy to others, thankfulness, trustworthiness, sincerity, and love and affection. Conversely, cooperativeness and kind-heartedness are explicitly missing from the narrative. The analysis proves that humbleness and wisdom emerge as the most dominant moral virtues. Characters who lacked humbleness (Antioch and Cadmus) faced early and tragic deaths, whereas the humble younger brother (Ignotus) successfully navigated life and met Death peacefully as an old friend. This study concludes that the story serves as a philosophical allegory urging modern readers to abandon greed, practice existential acceptance, and embrace humility in facing mortality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is an essential aspect of culture that serves not only as creative writing but as an evolutionary guide to human values, communicating emotional, spiritual, and intellectual concerns. Through fictional compositions, authors recreate alternative frameworks of reality that enable readers to cultivate deep insight, expand their empathy, and understand diverse moral coordinates within historical settings. As Henry van Dyke observed, literature interprets the underlying meanings of life and nature using artistic mediums of permanent interest. While novels and short stories are frequently read for entertainment, they fundamentally act as structured cognitive laboratories where severe ethical dilemmas are explored safely. Folk stories and fairy tales have long served as powerful allegories containing deep moral codes. A prominent contemporary example is J.K. Rowling's *"The Tale of the Three Brothers,"* a standalone bedtime fable seamlessly embedded into the overarching narrative of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Despite its fairy-tale structure, the story acts as a profound philosophical commentary regarding existential choices, fatalistic pride, and the inevitable reality of human mortality. The plot follows three

magical brothers who outsmart Death and receive three artifacts: the unbeatable Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Invisibility Cloak. The distinct trajectory of each brother reveals deep moral dynamics that contrast greed against humility. This study aims to discover the concrete types of moral values present in *The Tale of the Three Brothers*. Given that modern society is increasingly confronted by rampant materialism, an extreme avoidance of aging, and an escalating fear of mortality, examining Rowling's allegory becomes an instructive intellectual endeavor. By mapping the textual details against systematic ethical classifications, this paper uncovers how J.K. Rowling utilizes traditional folklore paradigms to advocate for humility and wisdom over pride and power.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design focused on content and textual analysis within the framework of literary criticism. Qualitative methods are most effective for this type of study as they allow the researcher to closely examine contextual nuances, decipher underlying symbols, and identify implicit themes within a text without relying on statistical measurements.

2.1 **Subject and Object:** The subject of this research is the narrative voice of J.K. Rowling. The object is the text of the short story *"The Tale of the Three Brothers"* found within her widespread fantasy novel collections.

2.2 **Data and Source:** The primary data consists of linguistic markers, including phrases, sentences, dialogues, and **paragraphs** extracted from the story that reflect ethical themes. The data source is the printed English text of the book.

2.3 **Data Collection Technique:** Data was gathered through close textual reading and careful recording. The story was read **repeatedly** to understand its thematic structure, and key segments showing character behavior and ethical dilemmas were highlighted and documented.

2.4 **Data Analysis Technique:** The analytic procedure followed a structural moral approach based on A.S. Hornby's (2010) theory of **eleven** moral values (bravery, humbleness, honesty, steadfastness, sympathy, cooperativeness, thankfulness, kind-heartedness, trustworthiness, sincerity, love/affection). The collected text snippets were categorized using this framework, analyzed to assess their contextual meaning, and verified using moral characteristics outlined by Bertens (1997) and Syamaun (2019) to ensure valid interpretive conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Reseach Results

The analytical application of Hornby's (2010) framework to *The Tale of the Three Brothers* indicates that nine out of the eleven moral values are actively represented within the textual scope. Two values (cooperativeness and kind-heartedness) are entirely absent from the story due to its specific focus on individual choices and tragic pride.

Table 1. The analytical application of Hornby's (2010)

No	Type of Moral Value (Hornby, 2010)	Textual Presence	Primary Character Association
1	Bravery	Present	Antioch & Ignotus

2	Humbleness	Present	Ignotus (Dominant)
3	Honesty	Present	Antioch (Flawed context)
4	Steadfastness	Present	Ignotus
5	Sympathetic to Others	Present	Cadmus (Selfish context)
6	Cooperativeness	Absent	None (Immediate separation)
7	Thankfulness	Present	Ignotus
8	Kind-hearted	Absent	None (Ambition & greed focus)
9	Trustworthiness	Present	Ignotus
10	Sincerity	Present	Cadmus
11	Love and Affection	Present	Cadmus

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. The Dominance of Humbleness

Humbleness is identified as the core moral virtue of the story. According to Hornby, humbleness is shown when a person does not view themselves as more important or powerful than others. This is perfectly illustrated by the youngest brother, Ignotus Peverell. When asked by Death to name his reward, Ignotus does not seek power or control over life. Instead, he asks for something that allows him to live his life without being pursued by Death, demonstrating his understanding that humans are not greater than the natural order of mortality. The text notes: *"He did not trust Death."* His humility leads him to choose the Invisibility Cloak, which he uses responsibly to live a quiet and peaceful life without seeking attention or power.

3.2.2. Tragic Values: Flawed Sympathy, Sincerity, and Love

Cadmus Peverell, the second brother, highlights the tragic potential of sincerity and love when they are not guided by wisdom. Driven by sincere affection for his late fiancé, Cadmus uses the Resurrection Stone to bring her back from the dead. The text describes his experience:
"To his amazement and his delight, the figure of the girl he had once hoped to marry, before her untimely death, appeared at once before him. Yet she was sad and cold, separated from him as by a veil." While his love is real and deep, his sympathy becomes selfish because he focuses on his own grief rather than the peace of his deceased beloved. Because he cannot accept the permanence of death, he is driven to despair and suicide to join her, showing that love without acceptance can become destructive.

3.2.3. Defiant Values: Bravery and Flawed Honesty

Antioch Peverell, the eldest brother, represents bravery and honesty used for selfish ends. His bravery allows him to face difficult situations, but it turns into dangerous pride when he demands an unbeatable wand. Similarly, his honesty is flawed; he openly boasts about his powerful weapon in public.

This lack of humility invites jealousy, and he is murdered in his sleep, showing that honesty and bravery without wisdom can lead to disaster.

3.2.4. The Absent Values: Cooperativeness and Kind-heartedness

The absolute absence of cooperativeness highlights the brothers' isolation. Immediately after receiving their gifts, the text observes: *"In due course the brothers separated, each for his own destination."* They do not collaborate or offer each other counsel, which accelerates the tragic downfalls of the older two brothers. Furthermore, no active deeds of selfless kindness or charity (kind-heartedness) are documented; the story intentionally focuses on the severe consequences of pride and greed to emphasize its core moral lessons.

3.2.5. Structural Integration of Moral Choices

As shown in Ignotus's final days, steadfastness, thankfulness, and trustworthiness lead to an honorable life. He remains true to his principles, uses his gift responsibly, and eventually passes the cloak to his son. Through these contrasting paths, Rowling shows that while pride and greed bring self-destruction, humility leads to a peaceful and fulfilling life.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the content analysis of J.K. Rowling's *The Tale of the Three Brothers* through Hornby's (2010) framework, this study draws two main conclusions:

4.1. Partial Framework Alignment: The narrative contains nine of Hornby's eleven moral values: bravery, humbleness, honesty, steadfastness, sympathy, thankfulness, trustworthiness, sincerity, and love/affection. Cooperativeness and kind-heartedness are absent, as the story focuses on the consequences of personal pride and isolation.

4.2.The Victory of Humility over Pride: The story functions as a moral allegory comparing pride against humility. Antioch and Cadmus pursue power and control, leading to their tragic downfalls. In contrast, Ignotus's choice of the Invisibility Cloak reflects a humble acceptance of human limitations, allowing him to live a long, meaningful life and face death with dignity.

For educators and literary scholars, this story remains a valuable text for moral instruction, encouraging readers to choose wisdom and humility over pride and ambition.

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