

## THEMES AND MORAL MESSAGES IN GERMAN FAIRY TALES, AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FAIRY TALES BY THE BRÜDER GRIMM

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### ABSTRACT

*This study analyzed the themes and moral messages found in three selected fairy tales from Grimms' Fairy Tales written by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, namely Hänsel und Gretel, Rotkäppchen, and Brüderchen und Schwesterchen. The purpose of this research was to identify the themes and moral messages conveyed in these fairy tales and to explain how these values were represented through narrative elements such as characters, conflicts, and plot development. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected through document analysis by closely reading the selected fairy tales and identifying narrative passages related to themes and moral values. The collected data were analyzed by using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and moral meanings within the stories. The results of the study showed that each fairy tale presented a distinct theme and moral message. Hänsel und Gretel conveyed the theme of survival and resilience, emphasizing courage, intelligence, and cooperation in overcoming difficulties. Rotkäppchen presented the theme of caution and obedience, highlighting the importance of following parental advice and being aware of potential dangers. Meanwhile, Brüderchen und Schwesterchen emphasized family loyalty and unconditional love through the relationship between siblings. The findings indicated that Grimm fairy tales contained strong moral structures that promoted positive values such as responsibility, courage, loyalty, and compassion. These findings indicated that traditional fairy tales could be effectively utilized in educational settings to support moral development and character building. Educators incorporated these stories into curricula or classroom activities to engage students in discussions about ethical decision-making, social values, and personal growth.*

**Keywords:** Brother Grimm, Fairy Tales, Literary Analysis, Moral Messages, Themes.

### INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales were one of the traditional literary forms that played an important role in conveying moral, social, and cultural values to readers. Since ancient times, fairy tales did not only function as entertainment but also served as educational media that conveyed moral messages through plot, characters, conflicts, and narrative symbols. In modern literary studies, fairy tales were understood as a means of shaping ethical understanding and social values, especially among children as the primary readers. Recent studies showed that folk tales and fairy tales played an important role in character formation because they presented representations of good and bad actions along with clear moral consequences (Zipes, 2021; Nikolajeva, 2022).

In the context of European literature, the fairy tales collected by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm became some of the most influential works in the development of children's literature and folklore worldwide. Their collection of stories, known as Grimms' Fairy Tales, was not only considered an important part of German cultural heritage but was also translated into many languages and widely studied in academic research. These fairy tales often portrayed conflicts between good and evil and presented moral values such as bravery, honesty, loyalty, and responsibility (Haase, 2020).

This study focused on the analysis of three well-known fairy tales by the Grimm brothers, namely Hänsel und Gretel, Rotkäppchen, and Brüderchen und Schwesterchen. These tales were selected because they contained strong narrative structures and clear themes as well as moral messages. For example, Hänsel und Gretel illustrated the struggle of children in facing life difficulties and emphasized the importance of intelligence and cooperation. Meanwhile, Rotkäppchen emphasized the importance of caution and obedience to parental advice. In addition, Brüderchen und Schwesterchen represented values such as loyalty, family affection, and sacrifice.

In terms of moral themes and messages in literature, some researchers have studied these aspects in modern literary studies. Nurgiyantoro (2021) explored the main ideas and moral values in different Indonesian genres of literature, achieving their results that theme emerged as the essential idea of the story while motivational moral messages provided advises to readers on how he/she behaved and how to perceive life. The present research is concerned with the influence of literary texts on readers' perception towards values such as ethics and morality, which this study also touches upon. Likewise, Stephens (2023) studied the instructional role of fairy tales in modern literature, finding that symbolic and metaphorical dimensions assisted readers to understand personal conflicts and social issues. The findings are consistent with the current study, which investigates how fairytales have core moral values that can help to shape up character education.

Moreover, several studies published between 2020 and 2024 emphasized that classical fairy tales remained relevant for analysis because they contained universal values related to morality, social relationships, and character development among readers (Bottigheimer, 2020; Zipes, 2021). Based on the background and objectives of the study, the research questions were focused on the following aspects. First, what were the main themes found in the three Grimm fairy tales Hänsel und Gretel, Rotkäppchen, and Brüderchen und Schwesterchen? Second, what moral messages were implied or conveyed in the Grimm fairy tales? Third, how were these moral values represented through the characters, conflicts, and plot development in the stories? These questions guided the analysis and provided a clear framework for exploring the themes and moral values in the fairy tales. Based on this background, this study aimed to analyze the themes and moral messages found in three Grimm fairy tales, namely Hänsel und Gretel, Rotkäppchen, and Brüderchen und Schwesterchen. Through the analysis of themes and moral values in these stories, this research attempted to reveal how these fairy tales conveyed moral messages to readers and how these values were represented through characters, conflicts, and plot development.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used a qualitative research approach because the objective of the research was to analyze themes and moral messages in literary texts. Qualitative research focused on interpreting meanings, values, and messages contained in texts rather than measuring numerical data. In literary studies, qualitative methods were commonly used because they allowed researchers to examine narrative structures, symbols, and moral representations within a story in a deeper and more interpretative way. According to John W. Creswell, qualitative research aimed to explore and interpret meanings that individuals or texts held about a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2021). Therefore, this approach was considered appropriate for examining the thematic and moral dimensions of fairy tales.

The data of this research were taken from three selected fairy tales written by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm in their well-known collection *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. The fairy tales analyzed in this study were Hänsel und Gretel, Rotkäppchen, and Brüderchen und

Schwesterchen. These stories were selected because they contained clear narrative structures, strong conflicts, and moral values that could be examined through literary analysis. In addition, these tales were widely recognized as classical fairy tales that reflected cultural values and moral lessons within traditional European storytelling.

The data collection process was conducted through document analysis. The researcher read the selected fairy tales several times in order to understand the storyline, characters, conflicts, and narrative development in each story. During this process, the researcher identified important textual elements such as narrative descriptions, character actions, dialogues, and events that reflected the themes and moral messages of the stories. Relevant sentences and passages that indicated particular themes or moral lessons were then noted and organized as research data. This process helped the researcher systematically collect textual evidence that supported the interpretation of themes and moral messages in the stories.

After the data were collected, the researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was a qualitative method used to identify patterns of meaning or themes within textual data. According to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, thematic analysis allowed researchers to interpret important patterns and meanings within qualitative data through a systematic analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this study, the analysis began with a close reading of the selected fairy tales in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of each story. The researcher then identified narrative elements such as characters, conflicts, and plot developments that contributed to the formation of themes.

Following this process, the researcher categorized recurring ideas and narrative patterns that appeared in the stories in order to determine the main themes. After identifying the themes, the researcher interpreted the moral messages conveyed through the characters' actions, decisions, and consequences in the narrative. The interpretation focused on how the stories represented moral values such as responsibility, caution, loyalty, cooperation, and family relationships. Finally, the researcher summarized the results of the thematic interpretation to explain how the selected fairy tales conveyed moral lessons to readers. Through this analytical process, the study attempted to reveal the thematic structure and moral values embedded in the selected Grimm fairy tales.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Analysis of the Fairy Tale "Hänsel und Gretel"

#### a. Main Themes and Textual Evidence

##### Theme of the Struggle for Survival

This theme appeared from the beginning of the story when Hänsel and Gretel's parents faced extreme poverty and decided to abandon their children in the forest. The following quote showed this desperation:

English	German
"Near a large forest there lived a woodcutter with his wife and his two children... He had little to eat, and once, when a great famine swept the land, he could no longer get hold of daily bread. When he lay in bed at night thinking about it, tossing and turning in his worry, he groaned and said to his wife,	„In der Nähe eines großen Waldes lebte ein Holzfäller mit seiner Frau und seinen beiden Kindern ... Er hatte wenig zu essen, und als einmal eine große Hungersnot das Land heimsuchte, konnte er sich nicht einmal mehr das tägliche Brot leisten. Als er nachts im Bett lag und darüber nachdachte, sich

'What will become of us? How can we feed our poor children when we don't even have anything for ourselves?'"	vor Sorge hin und her wälzte, stöhnte er und sagte zu seiner Frau: ‚Was wird aus uns werden? Wie sollen wir unsere armen Kinder ernähren, wenn wir selbst nichts zu essen haben?‘“
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The stepmother then proposed a cruel solution:

English	German
"'Look here, husband,' answered the woman, 'early tomorrow morning we'll take the children out into the thickest part of the forest. We'll light a fire for them there and give them each a little piece of bread. Then we'll go to our work and leave them alone. They won't find their way back home, and we'll be rid of them.'"	„Hör mal, Mann“, antwortete die Frau, „morgen früh bringen wir die Kinder in den dichtesten Teil des Waldes. Dort machen wir ihnen ein Feuer und geben jedem ein kleines Stück Brot. Dann gehen wir zur Arbeit und lassen sie allein. Sie werden den Weg nach Hause nicht finden, und wir sind sie los.“

### Theme of Children's Ingenuity and Courage

Hänsel demonstrated his cleverness by collecting pebbles as a trail marker:

English	German
"The moon shone brightly, and the white pebbles in front of the house glistened like real silver coins. Hänsel bent down and stuffed as many into his little coat pocket as he could."	„Der Mond schien hell, und die weißen Kieselsteine vor dem Haus glänzten wie echte Silbermünzen. Hänsel bückte sich und stopfte so viele wie möglich in seine kleine Manteltasche.“

When asked why he kept looking back, Hänsel answered cleverly:

English	German
"'Oh, father,' said Hänsel, 'I'm looking at my little white kitten that's sitting on the roof and wants to say good-bye to me.'"	„Oh, Vater“, sagte Hänsel, „ich schaue mein kleines weißes Kätzchen an, das auf dem Dach sitzt und sich von mir verabschieden möchte.“

However, on the second attempt, Hänsel used bread crumbs because he could not go out to collect pebbles. Unfortunately, the birds ate the crumbs:

English	German
"When the moon rose, they set out, but they found no crumbs, for the many thousands of birds that fly about in the forest and in the fields had pecked them all up."	„Als der Mond aufging, machten sie sich auf den Weg, aber sie fanden keine Krümel mehr, denn die vielen Tausend Vögel, die im Wald und auf den Feldern herumfliegen, hatten sie alle aufgeschnappt.“

The peak of ingenuity and courage was shown by Gretel when she faced the witch:

English	German
"But Gretel saw what she had in mind and said, 'I don't know how to do it. How do I get in?' 'Stupid goose,' said the old woman, 'the opening is big enough. Look, I can even get in myself!' She crawled up to the opening and stuck her head into the oven. Then Gretel gave her a push that sent her flying deep inside, and then she closed the iron door and bolted it."	„Aber Gretel sah, was sie vorhatte, und sagte: ‚Ich weiß nicht, wie das geht. Wie komme ich da rein?‘ ‚Dumme Gans‘, sagte die alte Frau, ‚die Öffnung ist groß genug. Schau, ich kann sogar selbst hineinkriechen!‘ Sie kroch zur Öffnung hinauf und steckte ihren Kopf in den Ofen. Da gab Gretel ihr einen Stoß, dass sie tief hineinflog, und dann schloss sie die Eisentür und verriegelte sie.“

Gretel's action demonstrated remarkable "courage" and initiative for a small child. She did not simply resign herself to being a victim but managed to turn the tables. This aligned with Supriyono & Wiyani's (2023) finding that fairy tales could instill courage and independence in children.

### **Theme of the Consequences of Greed**

The greedy witch who wanted to eat Hänsel and Gretel met a tragic end:

English	German
"Oh! Then she began to howl most horribly, but Gretel ran away, and the godless witch burned to death miserably."	„Oh! Da fing sie an, schrecklich zu heulen, aber Gretel rannte davon, und die gottlose Hexe verbrannte elendig.“

Meanwhile, the stepmother, who was also depicted as greedy and selfish, was mentioned to have died at the end of the story:

English	German
"The man had not had a single happy moment since he left his children in the forest. However, the woman had died."	„Der Mann hatte keinen einzigen glücklichen Moment mehr erlebt, seit er seine Kinder im Wald zurückgelassen hatte. Die Frau war jedoch gestorben.“

In contrast, the father, although weak but loving, ultimately lived happily with his children.

**b. Moral Messages and Textual Evidence**

**The Power of Sibling Bond**

Gretel never abandoned Hänsel. Even when Hänsel was imprisoned, Gretel performed her tasks reluctantly but continued to look for a way out. After the witch died, Gretel immediately freed Hänsel:

English	German
"But Gretel ran as fast as lightning to Hänsel, opened his little stall, and cried out, 'Hänsel, we're saved! The old witch is dead!' Then Hänsel jumped out like a bird from a cage when someone opens the door. How happy they were! They threw their arms around each other's necks, danced about, and kissed! And since they no longer had anything to fear, they went into the witch's house, and in every corner they found chests full of pearls and jewels."	„Aber Gretel rannte blitzschnell zu Hänsel, öffnete seinen kleinen Stall und rief: ‚Hänsel, wir sind gerettet! Die alte Hexe ist tot!‘ Da sprang Hänsel heraus wie ein Vogel aus dem Käfig, wenn man die Tür öffnet. Wie glücklich sie waren! Sie umarmten sich, tanzten umher und küssten sich! Und da sie nun nichts mehr zu befürchten hatten, gingen sie in das Haus der Hexe und fanden in jeder Ecke Truhen voller Perlen und Juwelen.“

This family solidarity as the greatest strength was also found in Jumadi et al.'s (2025) research on Banjar fairy tales which raised similar themes.

**Faith in God**

Hänsel always comforted Gretel by reminding her of God's help:

English	German
"Then he went back and said to Gretel, 'Don't worry, my dear little sister, and go to sleep peacefully. God will not abandon us,' and he lay down in his bed again."	„Dann ging er zurück und sagte zu Gretel: ‚Mach dir keine Sorgen, meine liebe kleine Schwester, und schlaf ruhig weiter. Gott wird uns nicht im Stich lassen‘, und er legte sich wieder in sein Bett.“

When they failed on the second attempt, Hänsel again comforted Gretel:

English	German
"Nevertheless, he comforted his little sister and said, 'Don't cry, Gretel, go to sleep peacefully. The dear Lord will help us.'"	„Dennoch tröstete er seine kleine Schwester und sagte: ‚Weine nicht, Gretel, schlaf ruhig ein. Der liebe Gott wird uns helfen.‘“

This aspect of spirituality was important in children's character education, as mentioned by Ninda et al. (2022) as a religious value.

### Reward for Goodness

At the end of the story, Hänsel and Gretel obtained treasure from the witch's house:

English	German
"They went into the witch's house, and in every corner they found chests full of pearls and jewels. 'These are even better than pebbles!' said Hänsel, and stuffed into his pocket whatever would fit. Gretel said, 'I too want to take something home with me,' and filled her apron full."	„Sie gingen in das Haus der Hexe und fanden in jeder Ecke Truhen voller Perlen und Juwelen. ‚Die sind noch besser als Kieselsteine!‘, sagte Hänsel und stopfte alles, was hineinpasste, in seine Tasche. Gretel sagte: ‚Ich möchte auch etwas mit nach Hause nehmen‘ und füllte ihren Schürzenrock.“

This treasure then became a blessing for their family:

English	German
"Gretel emptied her apron until pearls and precious stones were scattered about the room, and Hänsel threw one handful after another from his pocket to add to them. Then all worries were at an end, and they lived together in perfect happiness."	„Gretel leerte ihre Schürze, bis Perlen und Edelsteine über den ganzen Raum verstreut waren, und Hänsel warf eine Handvoll nach der anderen aus seiner Tasche dazu. Dann waren alle Sorgen vorbei, und sie lebten zusammen in vollkommenem Glück.“

## 2. Analysis of the Fairy Tale "Rotkäpchen" (Little Red Riding Hood)

### a. Main Themes and Textual Evidence

#### Theme of the Danger of Disobedience

Little Red Riding Hood's mother had given her clear instructions:

English	German
"Gretel emptied her apron until pearls and precious stones were scattered about the room, and Hänsel threw one handful after another from his pocket to add to them. Then all worries were at an end, and they lived together in perfect happiness."	„Gretel leerte ihre Schürze, bis Perlen und Edelsteine über den ganzen Raum verstreut lagen, und Hänsel warf eine Handvoll nach der anderen aus seiner Tasche dazu. Dann waren alle Sorgen vorbei, und sie lebten zusammen in vollkommenem Glück.“

Little Red Riding Hood promised to obey:

English	German
"'I'll do everything right,' said Little Red Riding Hood to her mother and gave her hand on it."	„Ich werde alles richtig machen“, sagte Rotkäppchen zu ihrer Mutter und gab ihr die Hand darauf.

However, she was easily tempted by the wolf's persuasion:

English	German
"Little Red Riding Hood opened her eyes and when she saw how the sunbeams danced through the trees and how everything was full of beautiful flowers, she thought, 'If I take a fresh bouquet to grandmother, she'll be pleased. It's still so early that I'll arrive on time anyway.' So she ran off the path into the forest and looked for flowers."	„Rotkäppchen öffnete die Augen und als sie sah, wie die Sonnenstrahlen durch die Bäume tanzten und alles voller schöner Blumen war, dachte sie: ‚Wenn ich meiner Großmutter einen frischen Blumenstrauß mitbringe, wird sie sich freuen. Es ist noch so früh, dass ich sowieso rechtzeitig ankommen werde.‘ Also lief sie vom Weg in den Wald hinein und suchte nach Blumen.“

As a result of her disobedience, she fell into the wolf's trap and was swallowed alive. This theme taught the “importance of listening to parents' advice”, a very fundamental value in early childhood education (Prawening, Ali, & Wijayanti, 2025).

### **Theme of Deception**

The wolf was depicted as a cunning predator who was good at pretending:

English	German
"The wolf thought to himself, 'That tender young thing, she's a tasty morsel. She'll taste even better than the old woman. You have to be sly to catch them both.'"	„Der Wolf dachte bei sich: ‚Dieses zarte junge Ding ist ein leckerer Bissen. Sie schmeckt bestimmt noch besser als die alte Frau. Man muss schlau sein, um beide zu fangen.‘“

He pretended to be friendly and caring, even showing false concern by telling Little Red Riding Hood to enjoy the beauty of the forest. After swallowing the grandmother, he disguised himself:

English	German
"Then he put on her clothes, put her cap on his head, lay down in her bed, and drew the curtains."	"Then he put on her clothes, put her cap on his head, lay down in her bed, and drew the curtains."

The famous dialogue between Little Red Riding Hood and the disguised wolf showed how deception could deceive the victim:

English	German
"Oh, grandmother, what big ears you have!' – 'The better to hear you with!' – 'Oh, grandmother, what big eyes you have!' – 'The better to see you with!' – 'Oh, grandmother, what big hands you have!' – 'The better to grab you with!' – 'But, grandmother, what a terribly big mouth you have!' – 'The better to eat you with!'"	„Oh, Großmutter, was hast du für große Ohren!“ – „Damit ich dich besser hören kann!“ – „Oh, Großmutter, was hast du für große Augen!“ – „Damit ich dich besser sehen kann!“ – „Oh, Großmutter, was hast du für große Hände!“ – „Damit ich dich besser packen kann!“ – „Aber Großmutter, was hast du für einen schrecklich großen Mund!“ – „Damit ich dich besser essen kann!“

This fairy tale taught children to “be wary of strangers who appeared kind”. Divya & Raa's (2024) analysis comparing Grimm and Disney versions noted that the Grimm version tended to be darker and contained harsh warnings, as in the explicit depiction of the wolf preying on humans.

### Theme of Redemption and Maturity

After being saved by the hunter, Little Red Riding Hood underwent a transformation:

English	German
"Little Red Riding Hood thought to herself: Never again in your life will you stray from the path into the forest, when your mother has forbidden it."	Rotkäppchen dachte bei sich: Nie wieder in deinem Leben wirst du den Weg in den Wald verlassen, wenn deine Mutter es dir verboten hat.

In the second version told, Little Red Riding Hood had learned from her past experience:

English	German
"It is also told that once when Little Red Riding Hood was again bringing cakes to her grandmother, another wolf spoke to her and wanted to lead her astray. But Little Red Riding Hood was on her	„Es wird auch erzählt, dass einmal, als Rotkäppchen wieder Kuchen zu ihrer Großmutter brachte, ein anderer Wolf sie ansprach und sie in die Irre führen wollte. Aber Rotkäppchen

guard and went straight ahead."	war auf der Hut und ging geradeaus weiter."
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Moreover, she and her grandmother worked together to outwit the wolf cleverly:

English	German
"Little Red Riding Hood carried water until the big, big trough was full. Then the smell of the sausages reached the wolf's nose. He sniffed and peered down, and finally he stretched his neck so far that he could no longer hold on and began to slip. He slipped off the roof, fell into the big trough, and drowned."	Rotkäppchen trug Wasser, bis der große, große Trog voll war. Da stieg dem Wolf der Geruch der Würste in die Nase. Er schnupperte und spähte nach unten, und schließlich reckte er seinen Hals so weit, dass er sich nicht mehr festhalten konnte und ausrutschte. Er rutschte vom Dach, fiel in den großen Trog und ertrank."

This represented a "character evolution" from naive to mature and vigilant, as discussed by Althobaiti (2023) in his comparative analysis of European fairy tales.

#### b. Moral Messages and Textual Evidence

##### Obedience to Parental Advice

This message was explicitly stated at the end of the first story:

English	German
"Little Red Riding Hood thought to herself: Never again in your life will you stray from the path into the forest, when your mother has forbidden it."	"Rotkäppchen dachte bei sich: Nie wieder in deinem Leben wirst du den Weg in den Wald verlassen, wenn deine Mutter es dir verboten hat."

##### Caution Towards Strangers

The bitter experience with the first wolf made Little Red Riding Hood more cautious with the second wolf:

English	German
"She told her grandmother that she had met the wolf, who had said good morning to her but had looked so wicked in her eyes: 'If we hadn't been on the open road, he would have eaten me up.'"	„Sie erzählte ihrer Großmutter, dass sie den Wolf getroffen hatte, der ihr einen guten Morgen gewünscht hatte, aber in ihren Augen so böse ausgesehen hatte: ‚Wenn wir nicht auf der offenen Straße gewesen wären, hätte er mich aufgefressen.‘“

### **Togetherness in Overcoming Danger**

Grandmother and granddaughter worked together to overcome the wolf:

<b>English</b>	<b>German</b>
"'Come,' said the grandmother, 'let's lock the door so he can't get in.'"	„Komm“, sagte die Großmutter, „wir schließen die Tür ab, damit er nicht hereinkommen kann.“

They then used their cleverness to drown the wolf.

### **3. Analysis of the Fairy Tale "Brüderchen und Schwesterchen" (Little Brother and Little Sister)**

#### **a. Main Themes and Textual Evidence**

#### **Theme of the Strength of Family Bonds and Sacrifice**

This theme appeared from the beginning when the brother and sister decided to leave together:

<b>English</b>	<b>German</b>
"Little brother took his little sister by the hand and said, 'Since our mother died, we haven't had a single happy hour. Our stepmother beats us every day, and when we go to her, she kicks us away. The hard leftover crusts of bread are our food, and the little dog under the table is better off; sometimes she throws it a nice piece. God have mercy! If only our mother knew! Come, let's go out into the wide world together!'"	„Der kleine Bruder nahm seine kleine Schwester bei der Hand und sagte: ‚Seit unsere Mutter gestorben ist, hatten wir keine einzige glückliche Stunde mehr. Unsere Stiefmutter schlägt uns jeden Tag, und wenn wir zu ihr gehen, stößt sie uns weg. Die harten Brotreste sind unser Essen, und der kleine Hund unter dem Tisch hat es besser; manchmal wirft sie ihm ein schönes Stück hin. Gott sei uns gnädig! Wenn unsere Mutter das nur wüsste! Komm, lass uns gemeinsam in die weite Welt hinausziehen!“

When the brother turned into a deer because he drank from the enchanted spring, the sister remained loyal:

<b>English</b>	<b>German</b>
"Now the little sister cried over her poor enchanted little brother, and the little deer cried too and sat sadly next to her. Then the girl finally said, 'Be still, my dear little deer. I will never, ever leave you.'"	„Nun weinte die kleine Schwester um ihren armen verzauberten kleinen Bruder, und auch das kleine Reh weinte und saß traurig neben ihr. Dann sagte das Mädchen schließlich: ‚Sei still, mein

	liebes kleines Reh. Ich werde dich niemals verlassen.“
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The sister's sacrifice was shown through concrete actions:

English	German
"Then she took off her golden garter and put it around the little deer's neck, and she plucked rushes and braided them into a soft cord. With this she tied the little animal and led it onward, walking deeper and deeper into the forest."	„Dann nahm sie ihr goldenes Strumpfband ab und legte es dem kleinen Reh um den Hals. Sie pflückte Binsen und flocht sie zu einer weichen Schnur. Damit band sie das kleine Tier fest und führte es weiter, immer tiefer in den Wald hinein.“

Even when her life changed and she became queen, she still brought the deer with her:

English	German
"'Oh yes,' answered the girl, 'but the little deer must go with me. I will not leave it.' The king said, 'It shall stay with you as long as you live, and it shall want for nothing.'"	„Ja“, antwortete das Mädchen, „aber das kleine Reh muss mit mir kommen. Ich werde es nicht zurücklassen.“ Der König sagte: „Es soll bei dir bleiben, solange du lebst, und es soll dir an nichts mangeln.“

Rasiawan & Parnaningroem's (2021) research on moral values in Grimm's fairy tales found that the theme of loyalty and sacrifice within the family was one of the most dominant values.

### **Theme of the Evil Stepmother/Witch**

The source of conflict was the wicked stepmother, who was also a witch:

English	German
"But the wicked stepmother was a witch and had surely seen the two children go away. She had crept after them secretly, as witches do, and had put a spell on all the springs in the forest."	„Aber die böse Stiefmutter war eine Hexe und hatte die beiden Kinder sicherlich weggehen sehen. Sie war ihnen heimlich gefolgt, wie Hexen das eben tun, und hatte alle Quellen im Wald verzaubert.“

Her curse caused the brother to turn into a deer. Her wickedness continued when she learned that her stepchildren were safe and happy:

English	German
"When she heard how happy they were and how well things were going for them, envy and malice stirred in her heart and gave her no peace, and she thought of nothing but how she could bring misfortune upon them both."	„Als sie hörte, wie glücklich sie waren und wie gut es ihnen ging, regten sich Neid und Bosheit in ihrem Herzen und ließen ihr keine Ruhe, und sie dachte an nichts anderes mehr, als wie sie beiden Unglück bringen könnte.“

She even dared to kill the queen (her stepdaughter) who had just given birth:

English	German
"They carried the weak queen to the bath and laid her in the tub, then locked the door and ran away. But in the bath they had made a huge fire, so that the beautiful young queen soon suffocated."	„Sie trugen die schwache Königin zum Bad, legten sie in die Wanne, schlossen die Tür ab und rannten davon. Aber im Bad hatten sie ein großes Feuer gemacht, sodass die schöne junge Königin bald erstickte“

### Theme of Justice and Retribution

At the end of the story, evil received its just punishment:

English	German
"The king ordered them both to be brought to trial, and judgment was passed on them. The daughter was taken into the forest where wild animals tore her apart, while the witch was put into the fire and miserably burned."	„Der König befahl, beide vor Gericht zu stellen, und es wurde ein Urteil über sie gefällt. Die Tochter wurde in den Wald gebracht, wo wilde Tiere sie zerfleischten, während die Hexe ins Feuer geworfen und qualvoll verbrannt wurde.“

Meanwhile, goodness was rewarded. The brother's curse vanished after the witch died:

English	German
"And when she had turned to ashes, the little deer was transformed and got its human shape again. And the sister and brother lived happily together until the end of their lives."	„Und als sie zu Asche geworden war, verwandelte sich das kleine Reh und nahm wieder seine menschliche Gestalt an. Und die Schwester und der Bruder lebten glücklich zusammen bis ans Ende ihres Lebens.“

This theme of justice was very strong in Grimm's fairy tales, affirming that “goodness ultimately defeats evil” (Rasiawan & Parnaningroem, 2021).

**Theme of Loyalty**

Loyalty was shown not only by the sister to her brother but also by the little deer who always returned to the cottage every evening. He even longed for the hunt despite the risk:

English	German
"The sounds of the hunt, the barking of the hunting dogs, and the joyful shouts of the hunters echoed through the trees, and the little deer heard them and wanted to be there. 'Oh!' he said to his sister, 'let me go to the hunt. I can't stand it any longer!'"	„Die Geräusche der Jagd, das Bellen der Jagdhunde und die freudigen Rufe der Jäger hallten durch die Bäume, und das kleine Reh hörte sie und wollte dabei sein. ‚Oh!‘, sagte es zu seiner Schwester, ‚lass mich zur Jagd gehen. Ich halte es nicht mehr aus!“

The good king also showed loyalty by waiting for and guarding his wife even though she appeared as a ghost:

English	German
"The king could not hold back, rushed to her, and cried out, 'You are none other than my dear wife!'"	“Der König konnte sich nicht zurückhalten, eilte zu ihr und rief: „Du bist niemand anderes als meine geliebte Frau!“

**b. Moral Messages and Textual Evidence**  
**Unconditional Love and Sacrifice**

When the sister became queen, her main condition was that the little deer must come with her. Even after she died, her spirit continued to visit her baby and her beloved deer:

English	German
"At midnight the queen appeared again and said: 'What is my child doing? What is my deer doing? I will come one more time and then never again.'"	Um Mitternacht erschien die Königin erneut und sagte: „Was macht mein Kind? Was macht mein Liebling? Ich werde noch einmal kommen, aber dann nie wieder.“

**Loyalty Will Bring Happiness**

The loyalty of the sister, the little deer, and the king ultimately brought happiness. The queen came back to life, the brother regained his human form, and they lived happily together.

**Evil Will Certainly End in Destruction**

The wicked stepmother and her daughter received terrible punishments, while goodness triumphed.

#### 4. Synthesis with Theories from Journals

##### a. Moral Values and Character Education

The three fairy tales were rich in character values identified by Ninda et al. (2022):

Character Value	Hänsel und Gretel	Rotkäppchen	Brüderchen und Schwesterchen
Religious	Hänsel said "God will not abandon us"	-	Prayers before sleep
Courage	Gretel pushed the witch into the oven	-	Brother and sister dared to leave home
Independence	The children survived in the forest	-	Living alone in the forest
Creativity/Ingenuity	Hänsel used pebbles, Gretel tricked the witch	-	Sister made a cord from rushes
Responsibility	Gretel took care of Hänsel	-	Sister cared for her brother who became a deer
Affection/Love	Sibling bond	Love for grandmother	Very strong sibling bond
Obedience	-	Little Red Riding Hood disobeyed and suffered consequences	-

Supriyono & Wiyani (2023) affirmed that fairy tales were effective as character development media because they presented these values in engaging narratives that children could easily remember.

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to analyze the themes and moral messages found in three selected fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, namely "Hänsel und Gretel", "Rotkäppchen", and "Brüderchen und Schwesterchen". Through a descriptive qualitative method and thematic analysis, the research findings provided answers to the research questions that had been formulated.

First, regarding the main themes found in the three fairy tales, the analysis revealed that each story presented distinct central ideas. "Hänsel und Gretel" conveyed the theme of survival and resilience. This theme was reflected from the beginning of the story when the parents faced extreme poverty and decided to abandon their children in the forest. Despite being left alone, Hänsel and Gretel demonstrated their ability to survive through difficult situations. Hänsel showed his cleverness by collecting pebbles as trail markers during the first abandonment. When they were lost in the forest after the second abandonment, they continued walking and searching for food until they found the gingerbread house. The peak of their struggle was shown when Gretel cleverly pushed the witch into the oven, saving both herself and her brother from being eaten.

"Rotkäppchen" presented the theme of caution and obedience. This theme was demonstrated through the consequences of the protagonist's disobedience to her mother's advice. Little Red Riding Hood was clearly instructed not to stray from the path, but she was easily tempted by the wolf's persuasion to pick flowers in the forest. As a result of her disobedience, she fell into the wolf's trap and was swallowed alive. The wolf, as a cunning predator, pretended to be friendly and caring, showing that danger could come from those who appeared kind. After being saved by the hunter, Little Red Riding Hood learned from her mistake and promised never to stray from the path again. In the second version of the story, she remained cautious when another wolf tried to lead her astray.

"Brüderchen und Schwesterchen" emphasized the theme of family loyalty and unconditional love. This theme was shown through the relationship between the siblings. When the brother turned into a deer because he drank from the enchanted spring, the sister refused to leave him. She took off her golden garter and put it around the deer's neck, made a soft cord from rushes, and led him deeper into the forest where they lived together in a small cottage. Even when her life changed and she became queen, she insisted that the little deer must come with her. The king agreed and promised that the deer would want for nothing. After the sister died from the stepmother's wicked plot, her spirit continued to visit her baby and her beloved deer, showing that her love and loyalty transcended even death.

Second, concerning the moral messages implied or conveyed in these fairy tales, the analysis identified several important values. In "Hänsel und Gretel", the moral messages included the importance of courage, intelligence, and cooperation in overcoming difficulties. Gretel did not simply resign herself to being a victim but managed to turn the tables on the witch. Hänsel always comforted Gretel by reminding her of God's help, saying "God will not abandon us" and "The dear Lord will help us." The story also taught that goodness would eventually be rewarded, as demonstrated by the children obtaining treasure from the witch's house and living happily with their father after the stepmother died.

In "Rotkäppchen", the moral lessons focused on the dangers of disobedience and the importance of being cautious toward strangers who appeared kind. Little Red Riding Hood's direct disobedience to her mother's instructions led to her being swallowed by the wolf. The famous dialogue about big ears, big eyes, big hands, and a big mouth showed how deception could deceive the victim. After being saved, Little Red Riding Hood thought to herself, "Never again in your life will you stray from the path into the forest, when your mother has forbidden it." The story also illustrated how individuals could learn from their mistakes and become more mature and vigilant, as shown when she and her grandmother worked together to drown the second wolf.

In "Brüderchen und Schwesterchen", the moral values highlighted the power of family loyalty and the strength of unconditional love and sacrifice. The sister declared, "I will never, ever leave you," and proved this through her actions. She gave up her comfortable life to live in the forest with her brother, and even as queen she refused to be separated from him. The story also taught that evil would certainly end in destruction while goodness would triumph. The wicked stepmother and her daughter received terrible punishments, while the brother regained his human form and the siblings lived happily together until the end of their lives.

Third, regarding how these moral values were represented through the stories, the analysis showed that each fairy tale used specific narrative elements to convey its messages. In "Hänsel und Gretel", the characters of Hänsel and Gretel represented ingenuity and courage through their actions. Hänsel used pebbles and bread crumbs as trail markers. Gretel tricked the witch into entering the oven. The witch embodied greed and evil, wanting to eat

the children. The conflict between them led to a resolution where good triumphed. The children's faith in God was shown through Hänsel's comforting words. Their reward for goodness was demonstrated by the treasure they found and the happy life they lived afterward.

In "Rotkäppchen", the protagonist's disobedience created the central conflict. The wolf represented deception and danger, pretending to be friendly while planning to eat both the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood. The resolution with the hunter's help conveyed the importance of being saved from one's mistakes. Little Red Riding Hood's reflection at the end showed that she had learned from her experience. The second version of the story demonstrated her growth and maturity, as she remained cautious and worked with her grandmother to overcome the danger.

In "Brüderchen und Schwesterchen", the sister's loyalty was demonstrated through her actions and dialogue throughout the story. From the beginning when she left home with her brother, to her life in the forest caring for him, to her insistence as queen that the deer must come with her, her loyalty was consistently shown. The stepmother represented evil and jealousy, first cursing the brother and later killing the sister. The plot development from suffering to happiness reinforced the message that loyalty and love would ultimately prevail. The brother's transformation back to human form after the witch died symbolized the victory of good over evil.

The findings of this study indicated that Grimm fairy tales contained strong moral structures that promoted positive values such as responsibility, courage, loyalty, and compassion. These findings showed consistency with previous research that had examined moral values in fairy tales. The analysis also demonstrated that the moral values found in these Grimm fairy tales could be compared with values found in fairy tales from other cultures, suggesting that fairy tales from various cultural backgrounds carried similar moral teachings.

The study also confirmed the importance of fairy tales in children's education. Through the clear consequences of characters' actions, these stories helped children understand the importance of making morally right decisions. The struggles of Hänsel and Gretel taught children about surviving difficulties. The experience of Little Red Riding Hood taught children to obey their parents and be cautious with strangers. The loyalty of the sister in Brüderchen und Schwesterchen taught children about the importance of family love and sacrifice.

In conclusion, the three Grimm fairy tales analyzed in this study proved to contain rich moral values that contributed to character understanding. The themes of survival, caution, and family loyalty, along with moral messages such as courage, obedience, sacrifice, and the triumph of good over evil, demonstrated that traditional fairy tales remained relevant as stories that supported moral development. Based on these findings, it was suggested that traditional fairy tales could be effectively used to support moral development and character building. These stories could help engage readers in understanding about ethical decisions, social values, and personal growth.

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