

## **Virtue of Friendship: A Comparative Character Study on E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web***

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### **Abstract**

*As defined by Aristotle in his Nichomachean Ethics, the virtue of friendship is being an absolute necessary to the happiness of a man. According to the theory, the virtue of friendship is reciprocated between the feeling of utility and an act of intention in advancing the happiness of one another and intention of furthering their own happiness. Wilbur, a little pig, is an altruistic friend in advancing the good for others. The protagonist embraces a journey of loyalty and courage deals with the hardships in saving others. Each step of the passage has unexpected twist and turns, which provides new experiences in igniting new spirit within the characters. Wilbur plays a role of real friend even he or she has nothing to gain in return from doing so. Thus, the present paper focusses on the detailed account of true meaning and concern of friendship through the stories of Charlotte's Web where the character plays the roles of heroism with natural respect and admiration.*

**Keywords:** *Children's Literature, comparative study, characters, friendship.*

The characters in any story are interlinked with the reality of life and promotes positive attitude toward the books. What makes the character effective is that, they have an insight of real-life confrontations and unfamiliar circumstances. Further the author projects the human experiences through the characters and it is valued. Nikki Gamble views of children on the judgement of moral codes in *Exploring Children's Literature* affirms: Children do not have perfect judgement; they do not have a vast range of experience to inform those judgements. In this respect literature serves an important role. Stories enhances children's understanding of complex human behaviour and enable them to experience vicariously a range of characters and relationships. (83)

This perception in the area of children's literature the stories are considered as of wise conduct in life being acquainted with the characters.

However, the characters in the stories serve as model for a real life, as they play a vital role in the progress of life and inculcate moral values in the lives of young minds.

Through the readings, the child develops a sense of morality. As Aristotle avers:

There are therefore three kinds of friendship, equal in number to the things that are lovable. Now those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other. So too with those who love for the sake of pleasure; it is not for their character that men love ready-witted people, but because they find them pleasant. (Eth. 8. 3. 1156a 1-6)

Friendships of utility exist between someone who are more established. On the other hand, Friendship of pleasure exists between the company being enjoyed. Both the virtues are similar and fleeting. These kinds are considered as tradeoffs and transactional in nature.

These relations are short lived in nature.

All the relationships eventually fade because of wants, needs, desires and wishes keep changing until the end. Certain relationships have something deeper, more honest, and meaningful. This deeper connection is the other kind of friendship that Aristotle describes as perfect friendship:

Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good and alike in virtue; for these wishes well alike to each other good, and they are good themselves.

Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of own nature and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good and goodness is an enduring thing. (Eth. 8. 3. 1156d 1-7)

Aristotle implies good friends love one another altruistically and love each other for the goodness of the other and they are good men who always wish what is good for other as being good.

The novel of E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* deals with one such kind of friendship further centers around the tender, life-changing between a pig named Wilbur and a spider named Charlotte. An eight-year-old Fern Arabel is devastated when she hears that her father is going to kill the pig, persuading her father that the piglet has right to live and promising to look after it, she saves the animal and names it Wilbur. As Wilbur becomes large Fern is forced to sell it to her uncle Homer Zuckerman whose barn is filled with animals who shun the newcomer. During the times of Christmas, Wilbur discovers that he will soon be slaughtered and being distraught. The hairy barn spider Charlotte lives in the rafter above his sty, decides to help him with the assistance of a sneaky rat Templeton. She writes a message in her web: 'Some Pig' and few more strange messages appeared in the web; the people around thought that, it was some Divine Manifestation and eventually, Wilbur inspired them.

Charlotte accompanies him to the county fair, where she spined her last note 'Humble' and Wilbur wins a special prize and his survival were ensured.

The above incident tells the best example of a perfect friendship, where Charlotte playing a role of being altruistic. When seeing these kinds of friendship, good wishes are being reciprocated and recognized for the sake of goodness of another. The goodwill and good wish are being first step to a friendship. Generally, this appears in the hearts of people filled with noble and courage.

Perfect friendship is a friendship of good man and of men who are similar according to their virtue. For they wish things that are good similarly to each other as good man and they are essentially good. So, these friends love one another for the sake of other and not accidentally. (Eth. 8. 3. 1156b 7-9) It becomes apparent that Charlotte was unwell. After laying hundreds of eggs, she was too

weak to return to the Zuckerman's farm. Wilbur takes the egg sac, leaving the dying Charlotte behind. Once home, he kept a watchful eye on the eggs. Although most of the spider left after hatching and three stayed behind in the barn, and they were the generations of Charlotte's offspring that comforted Wilbur for many years. This shows the goodness once done is being returned to us even when it is not expected. Charlotte being small in its feature still came forward to help Wilbur with her great plans and in her state of death Wilbur takes care of her progeny. When a good is done to one it returns to us in unexpected ways. This remains as a best example of a proverb 'A friend in need is a friend in deed'.

The next part of the story Wilbur's Great Adventure where he meets a lonely lamb Cardigan that is frowned upon and made fun by the other lamb. Wilbur takes Cardigan under his wings and becomes friend. Zuckerman suddenly sold Cardigan to another farmer so Wilbur along with his friends visits Cardigan to ensure that he was safe. On the journey to visit Cardigan an evil fox named Farley comes to steal Cardigan and plans to eat him. Wilbur plans to rescue his friend by trapping Farley in a pig web, other friends spin a word 'fox' in a spider web by the time Fern arrives and save Cardigan.

The above incidents say about essential friendship and perfect friendship, were the fox being a friend of the lamb he plans to eat him for his own good, being an essential friend bear good wish for one another egoistically, they think the other as a means to an ulterior end of their own. Aristotle contrasts this kind of friendship between love for friendship and love for love for wine, besides a good wish in friendship is reciprocated that friend would return good wish but wine would not. The friendship of Farley shows the quality of a wine 'these people do not feel affection for another as someone loved but as someone useful or pleasant'.

He explains:

Those loving for the sake of utility do not love one another essentially but rather as some good comes to be for themselves from each other. Similarly, those loving for the sake of pleasure, for men do not feel affection for witty people for having certain qualities but as he furnishes them some good or pleasure. (Eth.8.3. 1156a 10-14).

The goodwill comes with nobility but here the utility character does not feel goodwill for the sake of the useful qualities of another and apparently feel goodwill towards own for the sake of own benefit. Presumably goodwill is felt for own as a pleasant quality of another that would act as a sake of own pleasure.

The bond between Cardigan and Wilbur plays a role essentially altruistic. For it is essentially goodwill and good wishes, reciprocated and recognized for the sake of goodness of another. Good friendship is more stable than either useful or pleasant friendship. The useful and pleasant friendship lasts until the ones find them useful being temporary, when they attain their own ends the find no longer to be useful. But a good friendship performs good actions for another and stays permanent.

Friendship of good men last as long as they are good, and virtue endures. Useful and pleasant friendships are easily dissolved if the friends do not remain like one another, for if they no longer pleasant or useful, they cease to love each other. (Eth. 8. 3. 1156b 11-21).

Good friendship is more stable than either useful or pleasant and tends to have a relation that lasts longer. But egoistic and pleasant friendship do not remain like each other and does not lasts longer they are only for time being.

Therefore, someone might say metaphorically that good will is idle friendship, and that when it is prolonged and has arrived at familiarity, good will becomes friendship. But it does not become friendship for the sake of utility nor friendship for the sake of pleasure. For good will does not come to be for these things. (Eth. 9. 5. 1167a 10-14)

The implication is that good will can become good friendship, for it does not become egoistic or accidental friendship.

The friends who are essentially friends need not appear to differ in their actions from those who are accidentally friends. For a good friend performs good

actions for another, and his friends return the good actions. Useful or pleasant friend might also perform good actions for another, and his friend might return his good actions. But essential friends differ greatly from accidental friends in their intentions. Good friends perform their good offices with the intention of advancing the good of another. Useful and pleasant friends perform their offices with the intention of advancing their own good. Altruistic friends remain dissimilar to accidental and egoistic friendship. For altruistic friends are useful and pleasant to one another for the sake of each other, but being egoistic the live for their own sake.

Aristotle admits that pleasant friendship can become more stable. But his admissions only reinforce his distinction between accidental and essential friendship: 'Many pleasant friends however are constant if from familiarity they feel fondness for their characters being similar'. Pleasant friendship becomes stable only when aware the characters being similar.

But altruistic always has its uniqueness in the journey.

The friendship dealt here in the characters includes that good friendship is the essential species having intention in advancing the happiness of one another and that it is altruistic. Useful and pleasant friendships are accidental species act with the intention of furthering their own happiness and they are egoistic. The stories leave a footpath of a good friendship that makes things brighter.

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