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『ファミリーライフ』の子ども読み物に頻繁に現れる主題について

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A Preliminary Study on the Themes of Amish Children's Literature : Recurrent Themes in Children's Section Stories in *Family Life*

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Introduction

Amish people are Anabaptist Christian who live in the United States and Canada, mainly in the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Ontario. They have emigrated from Switzerland and its neighbouring areas, to avoid religious persecution. In 2010, they have an estimated population of about 250000 with 5% annual growth rate¹.

The Amish have a unique lifestyle that has not changed greatly over the last 200 years. For instance, they do not own a private telephone or car, and they do not use mains electricity or electrical gadgets. What makes their lifestyle particularly unique is the fact that Amish people live in highly developed countries. They live in close proximity to ordinary North American people whose lives are increasingly dependent on cars, mobile phones, personal computers, TVs, and other electric gadgets. Amish

¹ For general information on Amish people and their lifestyle, see Krabile, *The Mystery of the Amish* (1996), *Amish Schools* (2004), and *The Amish: its past, present and future* (2008), as well as Amish Studies website of Elizabeth Town College.

people are aware of the existence of such modern tools, but they control the flow of information and goods by deciding what to introduce into their society, based on their religious belief.

One surprising aspect of the Amish society is the fact that the Amish youth make a conscious decision to take up their traditional lifestyle. As Anabaptists, Amish people let their offsprings decide whether or not to (re)enter their religion in the form of adult baptism. The youth have a period called *Rumspringa* when they are allowed to experiment with their lives, sometimes even going against their religious social practices. Despite their traditional, mainly agricultural, lives where children and adults are engaged in strenuous physical labour from early morning till night, where there are clearly defined gender roles and dress codes, where life centres around religion---a lifestyle discarded by a majority of people in developed countries---the Amish have a high rate of retention(85%) .

What makes the Amish youth return to their parents' lifestyle rather than choosing the life of contemporary America or Canada around them? As Amish children have limited literary information in terms of entertainment and education, namely *Family Life* and school textbooks, our hypothesis is that examining these two types of material would reveal how Amish identity is formed in literal terms and a "safe" return from *Rumstringa* is programmed into the readers of these materials².

This is a preliminary study into the research of Amish children's literature whose overall aim is to clarify the role of literature in the lives of

² For the research into Amish school textbooks, see C. Oyabu et al. "Amish Education 1. Analysis of health textbooks" 岐阜大学教育学部研究報告(教育実践研究)第3卷 129-150 (2001), "Amish Education 2. Analysis of arithmetic textbooks" 岐阜大学教育学部研究報告(教育実践研究)第4卷 67-103 (2002), "Amish Education 3. Analysis of arithmetic textbooks" 岐阜大学教育学部研究報告(教育実践研究)第5卷 73-98 (2003), "Amish Education 4. Analysis of geography textbooks" 岐阜大学教育学部研究報告(教育実践研究)第6卷 (2004).

Amish children, especially, as stated above, in forming their Amish identity. We are particularly interested in how literature functions as an educational tool to prepare Amish children's return to the crede at the end of *Rumspringa*. Does the control practiced by Amish children's literature function in the same way as other religious children's literature such as Muslim children's literature? Can we use the same theoretical framework in analyzing this kind of religion-oriented works as the one used in analyzing political propaganda literature, whose aim is also to persuade readers to a particular viewpoint? These are the questions we wish to examine in studying Amish children's literature. As a preliminary study, however, our objective in this paper is to identify common themes observed in Children's Section stories found in Amish magazine, *Family Life*.

Family Life

Family Life is a monthly family and community magazine published in English by Pathway Publishers, Ontario. Almost all Amish household subscribe to it, as well as some other Anabaptist families such as the Menonites (C.Oyabu, 2004) In this study, we examine 310 Children's Section stories in *Family Life* published between 2003 and 2008. As in the previous study that examined 360 stories published between 1992 and 2003, each issue of *Family Life* has average 39 pages, and about 50% of the content is stories, 35% for adults, and 12.5% for children.

Children's Section has average 4.8 pages per issue, and contains four items such as original stories, poems, old sayings, Bible extracts, games and puzzles. In this paper, we focus on original stories which cover 85% of the Children's Section pages.

Family Life is written in English. At home the Amish people speak a language that is similar to Swiss German, called Pennsylvania Dutch.

Like Swiss German, Pennsylvania Dutch is a language for oral communication, so it does not have a public written form. The Amish children learn English at school, so one can say that *Family Life* is written in the language of education. Apart from Pennsylvania Dutch and English, an Amish household uses German as the language of the Bible³.

Categorization of Stories by Character Age-group, Action, and Lesson

In this preliminary study, we have divided Children's Section stories in terms of intended age group of readers, action depicted in the stories, and lessons provided by the stories.

Intended reader age group

Following the example of earlier research⁴, we divided stories into four groups according to the age of the main characters: pre-school age (1-5), lower elementary school age (6-10), higher elementary school age (11-13), and youth (over 14). This reflects Amish school system which consists of eight grades starting from the age of six. As stories are often told from the main characters' point of view, we regarded that the technique of identification is used, and determined that the age of the main characters indicates the age of intended readers. In some stories where it is hard to determine who the main character is, we listed the age of several prominent characters.

³ e.g. "Barbara and Her Books" (*Family Life* January 2003, 24)

⁴ 大藪千穂、杉原利治「Family Life 誌 "Children's Section" 分析からみたアーミッシュの教育」日本家政学会大会研究発表要旨集 vol.56, 101 (2004)、Chiho Oyabu and Toshiharu Sugihara, "Analysis of Amish Family-Based Education Through the "Children's Section" of *Family Life* Magazine" *Senri Ethnological Studies* vol.77 (2011) (in process)

Action depicted

We employed five different categories to group the content of the stories, in terms of actions depicted. They are Basic Sustenance (eating, sleeping, bathing, etc.), Work (house chores, looking after siblings, farm work, etc.), School and Educational Activities (studying, going to school, learning at school, etc.), Play, and Social Activities (doing community work, helping the society and those in need, participating in commercial interaction, etc). In the previous study, there was a category for monetary activities (saving, selling and buying, etc). However, as there are very few activities in this category (4%), and it occurs in the context of social interaction, we have included monetary action within social activities in this paper.

Lessons

Each Amish story has a lesson to be learned (moral). Often, the titles of the stories include the word “lesson”, and show the main characters learning some important Amish values within stories. Therefore, we have categorized stories in terms of Amish values: Psychological Growth through (difficult) experiences, the importance of family love, the importance of faith, and the importance of work in Amish society.

Quantitative Research Findings (Age) and Its Implications

As seen in Table 1, 27.5% of stories did not have any age description. However, half of all stories have main characters who are between 1 and 10, and 20% of the stories have main characters above 10. Of the latter, only 3% of the main characters are over 14. From this, we can say that

Children’s Section stories are written for younger children below puberty.

In each issue of Children’s Section, there is usually a story under the heading of “Story to Tell”. Stories under this heading has characters that are below five, thus the stories in this section are for very young children before the school age. Considering the fact that children below five does not go to school and therefore do not know English or how to read the language, “Story to Tell” may literary mean adults telling the stories to children in Pennsylvania Dutch.

Table 1. Age of the Main Characters

No age description	27.5%
Ages 1-5	27%
Ages 6-10	24.8%
Ages 11-13	17.7%
Ages over 14	3%

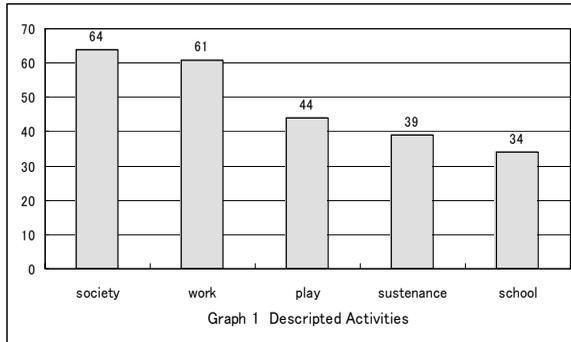
Quantitative Research Findings (Action) and Its Implications

In graph 1 horizontal axis show activities depicted in stories, and vertical axis shows the number of stories containing the activities.

As seen in Graph 1, Social Activities and Work are the two top Actions depicted in Children’s Section stories. From this one can say that in these stories, children are depicted in the context of work and social responsibility rather than as a childish entity, whose main occupation is to play, study, or live their childish lives.

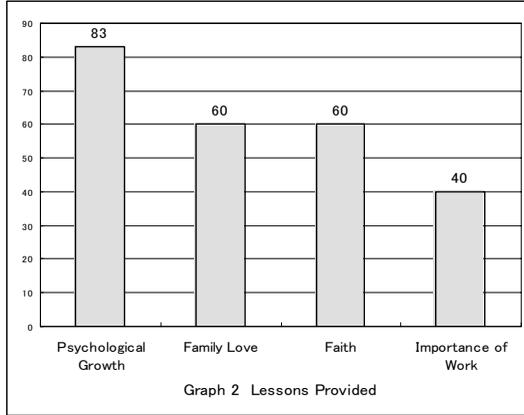
According to our observation of Amish households, children start working (i.e. helping household chores, looking after animals, etc.) from around the age of four. By the age of 11, they can accomplish many chores to adult standard, as seen in “The Broken Wheel” (*Family Life*, October 2003,

27), in which a boy drives a horse and cart skillfully without adult supervision. Depiction of children at work reflects their reality as well as reinforcing Amish lifestyle where children are expected to work according to their abilities from younger age.



Quantitative Research Findings (Amish values)

Graph 2 shows the kind of lessons provided by the stories. Horizontal axis shows the area in which the lessons appear, and vertical axis shows the number of stories depicting each area. Psychological Growth, which has the highest count among the stories deals with a cycle of Human Weakness causing Careless Deeds resulting in Dier Consequences. After such difficulties come Realization, Regret and Repentance, Thankfulness, and Forgiveness, all of which are important Amish values. For example, in “Betsy Forgets” (*Family Life*, January 2003, 28-29) the main character’s laziness made her leave toys on the ground causing her mother’s injury. However, her parents forgave her and she learned the lesson of not being lazy.



Psychological Growth has a basic theme of a Christian story, “A Prodigal Son”. In Amish context, the theme of Psychological Growth is particularly important, as the main character follows the same behavioral pattern as youth in Rumspringa period. The message here is clear: one can make mistakes. It may lead to an awful circumstance, but you will be forgiven, and the mistake can be a good opportunity to learn the lesson.

Compared to the previous study, the importance of Psychological Growth has increased. This may reflect the need of Amish literature to provide suitable experiences rather than preaching the importance of Family Love, which can be experienced within a family. Further studies into later years would be needed in order to determine whether or not this difference signifies a new trend.

Family Love and Faith have the same count showing an equal importance in the present study. In the previous study, family love exceeded all other categories, whereas Faith came the second. Collectively, increase in the count of Faith and Psychological Growth may indicate the inclination of Amish children’s stories to take more deductive stance, highlighting the social and religious values of Amish society.

Other Recurrent Themes (Books as Problematic Entity)

One noticeable recurrent theme within the current study is a self-reflective nature of some stories. In “Barbara and Her Books”, and “Susan, the Bookworm”, for instance, we can read the main characters reading *Family Life*. Surprisingly, books are not always depicted as useful in the stories.

According to “Barbara and Her Books”, the type of books found in a book-loving Amish household are factual and religious books:

Books on raising animals, ... on herbal remedies, On volcanoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes, books of poems, lots of books on Bible topics, ... German books. (*Family Life*. January 2003, p.24)

Further, books the family wishes to buy are “Encyclopedia, Childcraft books, science books, Books of knowledge, and a Free Bible.” In the world of Amish stories, Encyclopedia and Bible have a positive image, as they “assist school work” and contribute to family gathering where religious values are learned. In contrast, stories have a negative image, causing temptation to be arrogant, distraction from work as a book reader could escape into another world rather than facing the reality and engaged in useful activities⁵. Obtaining books can be seen as indulging in materialistic possession, isolating oneself and being isolated from friends who do not have enough time to indulge in such an activity. (“Barbara and Her Books”, 25)

Paradoxically, *Family Life* warns children the danger of being absorbed in books by letting a character call the main character who is absorbed in reading *Family Life* to go back to work. Also in “An Example

⁵ For instance, “Susan, the bookworm”(*Family Life*, June 2003, 28-30) show how the main character’s absorption in stories causes the injury of a toddler she was babysitting.

for Bennie” (*Family Life*, February 2008, 29-30) the carelessness of the main character causes his young brother to falling off a ladder from a height, and he learns the importance of being responsible for younger sibling.

Other Recurrent Themes (Comparison with Islamic Children’s Stories)

In examining Amish children’s literature, we have noticed similarities between Amish stories and Muslim Children’s stories. Here we would like to state some similarities between Children’s Section stories and stories published by The Islamic Foundation.⁶

The first similarity is the description of religious values such as thanking God, recognizing God’s presence in one’s life, and praying. The importance of family ties and house works can be observed in both types of stories. Limitation of one’s judgement appears in both literature where characters cannot understand the true meaning of the current situations they are in. Unlike non-religious children’s books that often deal with magic, fairies, and other imaginary creatures, Muslim and Amish children’s stories have realistic settings, usually with authoritative figures who control the setting, such as teachers and parents.

There are also differences between the two types of stories. Whereas Amish stories include *Rumspringa* elements where characters seem to behave against their religious principles, few characters in The Islamic Foundation stories behave “badly” in terms of religious practices.

There is also a big difference in referencing the world outside their communities. Whereas Amish stories have only limited description of the

⁶ See Torsten Janson, *Your Cradle Is Green— The Islamic Foundation & the Call to Islam in Children’s Literature*—(Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003) and Kana Oyabu, “The Treatment of Muslim and Other Characters in Muslim Children’s Literature in English” *Studies of Language and Culture* vol.14 121-144 (2010) for studies of children’s literature published by The Islamic Foundation.

world outside their own, Muslim stories are constantly concerned with the outside world, especially in stories for school age children. As many Muslim children go to local state schools, unlike the Amish counterpart who are educated in Amish schools, bullying and other interaction with non-muslim characters feature strongly in the depictions of their daily lives.

Conclusion

Children's Section stories in *Family Life* are one of the few sources of literary entertainment and education for Amish children. In this study, we have used both quantitative and qualitative approach to identify some of the major themes observed in the stories. Among those, important themes are those concerning work and social responsibilities, psychological growth and faith. Unusual aspect of the themes includes self-reflectivity in which the stories describe the problematic nature of being absorbed in reading books. By comparing with Muslim children's literature, one can identify the religious themes and rumspringa themes. We would like to build on these findings in order to make further research into the children's literature of the Amish people.

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アーミッシュ児童文学の主題に関する予備研究：

ファミリーライフの子ども読み物に頻繁に現れる主題について

大 藪 加 奈、塚 原 久 美、大 藪 千 穂

本論は現代アーミッシュ児童文学を扱う。産業化する以前の伝統的ライフスタイルを保っているアーミッシュの人々は、自分たちの理念と照らし合わせて必要だとみなされるものや考え方、情報のみアーミッシュ社会に取り入れるしくみを持っている。子ども向け読み物に関しては、ほとんどの家庭で月刊誌 *Family Life* の子ども用ページと学校の教科書が主な情報となっている。本論では、2003年から2008年の5年間に発行された *Family Life* の子ども用ページ掲載の物語310篇について、登場人物の年齢、描写されている行為、教訓を特定し、頻繁に現れる主題がどのようなものか調べた。その結果、登場人物の年齢は10歳以下が半数で、5歳以下の登場人物の物語では、同年齢の読者が英語を習っていない現状を反映して読み聞かせ用物語となっていた。また、13歳で独自の学校教育を終えるアーミッシュの子どもたちを反映して10歳以上の登場人物の話は、ほぼ(97%)13歳以下となっていた。描写される行為は、社会的活動と労働(地域での仕事・家事・農作業など)が遊びや学校での活動にくらべて高く、子ども時代から社会にかかわり労働しているアーミッシュ児童の現実を反映していると同時に、そのような存在としての子ども観を読み物が肯定・促進しているといえる。明示的・暗示的に教訓が示されるこれらの読み物では、人間的な弱さや不注意から失敗を犯す主人公が、後悔・反省を経て神への感謝や赦しの大切さなどのアーミッシュ的価値観へと目覚めて行く、いわゆるキリスト教的「放蕩息子(Prodigal Son)」の主題が顕著である。その他特徴的な主題としては、読み物でありながら本や読書を問題視する(健全な労働や生活から子どもを惑わす存在とみる)傾向があり、またモスLEM児童文学に比べると宗教的行為・言説の多用という類似点と、宗教から逸脱する主人公の存在という相違点が認められた。