

Children versus Adults — the Gap of Morality and Immorality —

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Introduction

E.L. Konigsburg (1930-2013) is an American writer of children's books who was born in the Bronx of New York City of Jewish parents. She is the first winner of the Newbery Medal for two books at the same time, *Jeniffer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth* (1967) and *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (1967). After that, she won the Newbery Medal again for another book, *The View from Saturday* (1996). When she was a nine years old, she began to study Hebrew, and a so clever girl, she always graduated with honors until graduate school. It could be possible to think that her personality probably influenced the figure of Claudia, who was a protagonist of *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. Her idea to write this story comes from once she brings her children to picnic, Konigsburg mentioned;

I thought myself that if my children ever left home, they never become barbarians, even if they were captured by pirates. Civilization was not a veneer to them; it was a crust. They would want at least of the comforts of home, plus a few dashes of extra elegance. Where, I wondered, would they ever consider running to if they ever left home? They certainly would never consider any place less elegant than the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (38-39, Ambrosek)

This passage shows how she was influenced by the events and how they relate to be this story's structure. Her children would survive being in an uncomfortable place or situation. In this way, she decided to write this story from the view point of a mother. This will be an important key of this paper, and here, we are going to focus on the gap between morality and immorality among the children and adults.

I . Morality and Immorality

The roots of children's literature, the 'Chap book' was created to raise children in Christian faith and morality. After a time, morality was seen as an unnecessary element in

children's literature. Unlike ordinary run-away stories of children's literature, Konigsburg treated morality differently in this book. This story is about a child's revolt against her parents, especially her mother. It does not insist that this is immoral, rather the author sees that revolt positively. The 'immorality' in the main story, children's revolt against parents and yearning independence, may leave the reader thinking that is human. Claudia, however, believes in her own 'morality', in what she thinks or decides, including her act of leaving home. According to Masako Shimizu, adults around her, including teachers at school, gave her nearly the same 'stories' (of moral), such as 'revenge is evil, and no exceptions'. When she receives uncomfortable treatment from the others, she always has to take revenge, so she struggled with her unworthy mind as in the stories she escapes from adults. She suffers immorality when she reads stories which were given by adults, but she could come to think that it was 'human', and she encounters Konigsburg's book after she grew-up. Her feeling was that revenge is human, and it is not 'immoral'. Once, children's books' readers were expected to receive notions of good or bad one-sidedly by adults. She shows that Claudia, children or readers have the rights to decide what is moral or not in children's literature comparing old type of children's books. It's up to children's feeling or thinking. Konigsburg claims freedom of thinking in her book about morality of children's literature. Her thinking creates something new in children's stories. Readers are excited while reading this story and agree with Claudia when she resists adults. Claudia's leaving-home is the fight, children versus adults. Children cheer Claudia, and share her complaint by putting themselves in her place.

II . Leaving-Home for Children and Adults

Shunichi Naruse writes 'home for children' who is a protagonist of these author's books' Kingsley, McDonald, Lewis, and Rowling, remind us of 'wildness' after paradise lost. These kinds of children look for paradise-like place and go on a journey. The reason to go on this journey is because their 'surrogate parents' could not have a good relationship with them, the protagonists. In this book, 'surrogate parents' character would be Mrs. Frankweiler. Claudia leaves home in the cause of her 'real' mother, unlike these author's stories which Naruse mentioned. Konigsburg suggests a new-style of leaving home, the matter comes from the real mother in diametric contradiction to the old-fashioned home-leaving style. Seemingly Claudia grew-up through the story, but there is a nothing changed, as Mrs. Frankweiler said,

Because you found that running away from home didn't make a real difference?

You were still the same Greenwich Claudia, planning and washing and keeping things in order? (138, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*)

It is matter of course, Claudia did not leave home because she wants to change or get something from the beginning. She just tried to leave home by using her intelligence. On the other hand, Konigsburg injects motherhood into her books. She gives pieces to Mrs. Frankweiler. When she created Frankweiler, she used her own schoolmistress as the model. However at the same time, Frankweiler may be the author herself. Naruse's opinion is that the existence of 'surrogate parents' can be seen as a trigger for children deciding to leave home, as they give an initiation journey to children. Surrogate parents are also written as if they were saints. In here, Konigsburg creates two characters of the mother or mother-like, (it can be seen as surrogate parents) and she gives reason for Claudia's journey of initiation, but the journey was unsuccessful. Claudia does not change or grow up through the initiation journey, like Konigsburg intended.

One of the most typical American children's books about 'leaving-home', *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), has similar elements to this story. According to Kenichi Takada, Huckleberry Finn can be seen as a person with wisdom that comes from experience, but he is also a poor powerless boy. In addition, Takada says that reason why Mark Twain did not write the details of how old a Huck is exactly is for Twain's purpose of showing Huck as tiny. It describes children's powerlessness, and poverty, and display adults' power. Nevertheless, Takada also mentioned that Huck is the envy of most children because he always disobeys what the St. Petersburg's children's mothers' instructions are: Claudia's mother's 'household rules'. It is close to Claudia's character in this story. Claudia is a heroine to readers like Huck, who was a hero of children of St. Petersburg's. The characters who revolt against adults are heroes or heroines for children, but for adults, they are the 'tall tree' of 'Tall trees catch much wind'. Takada's opinion, Huck's act can be seen as against-society, and against-adults. Huck's roll was to define the Tom Sawyer roll. The reason is that Huck is an 'outsider'. However, Claudia does not have the same problem as Huck at a glance, but she has always experiences loneliness. She is a good student at school, she always gets 'A', it is completely different from Huck, but they share the same issue of 'loneliness'. Especially America, multicultural country needs to spot the people who have elements of the 'outsider'. In the nineteenth century, poor whites like Huck were invisible in America until Mark Twain showed them to us. Besides in the 1960s, Konigsburg suggests a new type of 'outsider'. She pointed out the person who has morality, typical ordinary common student like Claudia, who has no complaints. The anguish was Konigsburg's problems

too. It is no matter what even she faced her loneliness, people could not see that kinds of problem on her at a first sight, but she shows what is the morality or immorality, and what struggled for, even the people like a Claudia against morality as old type of children's book saying. Children are also the 'outsider' in this adult society, and they groaned under tyranny, like Claudia. She complained about her mother, and she was lonely at home. She always looks for 'her comfortable place' where everyone appreciates her talent unlike her mother. Hence Claudia is a new icon of American children's literatures' heroine, like Huckleberry Finn.

III . Children's Flâneur figured by Adults

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn's was preceded by *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). This book was written for readers especially adults to remind them of their own childhood. Eric L. Tribunella says,

I argue that children's literature of the city participates in this enterprise, and given that most children's books are written by adults for and about children, they, too, recover childhood, combining the childhood curiosity of young protagonists with the capacity for self-expression possessed by the adult author who speaks through the child. (67, Tribunella)

So, to write children's literature is equal to writing children's stories for adults'. nostalgia. Twain's work suggests that he somewhat resembles Konigsburg. In this story, Konigsburg gives one element of Konigsburg herself Mrs. Frankweiler. Especially whom her own experience with her schoolmistress, Konigsburg uses her motherhood to depict Mrs. Frankweiler's. She also resembles Claudia's mother, she agreed with Claudia's claim sometimes, but finally she became the same as Claudia's mother, the old type of character from children's literature's that says, leaving-home is just children's resistance to adults. Mrs. Frankweiler's narration interferes with Claudia's mind by her excessive meddling in Claudia's internal affairs. That is, Tribunella shows how the adults' sense of values unconsciously affects these children. Their books are for their wish fulfillment. Hence, it is one of the reasons why Mrs. Frankweiler, who is the narrator of this story, appears in the title, even though this story's heroine is Claudia. Looking at this story's beginning and the ending, it is structured by Mrs. Frankweiler's letter. Mrs. Frankweiler tells a story of what she has heard from Claudia to Saxonburg, her lawyer, and it becomes a guide. Through Mrs. Frankweiler's narration, Claudia's voice disappears.

Mrs. Frankweiler herself benefits from Claudia's *flânerie*, *From the Mixed-Up Files* is her story as well. In fact, properly speaking, it is primarily the elder woman's story, as she is the narrator. Mrs. Frankweiler, who clings to her secrets as a source of private pleasure, extracts pleasure and a sense of satisfaction from telling about Claudia, her wanderings through the city and museum, her detective work, and her youthful enthusiasm. (83, Tribunella)

Clearly, youth is an unnecessary matter for a flâneur, and Mrs. Frankweiler gives youth to Claudia, as she sets Claudia up as a flâneur. Considering this, this is not just a children's story, but neither is it Mrs. Frankweiler's story alone.

Conclusion

In the past millennium, children's books were made just for controlling children by telling a story which included a preaching factor; children only received the values of morality and immorality accordance to adults. There is no creativity, and these stories eliminate the possibility of new evolutions of the next generation. Nevertheless, E. L. Konigsburg gives to children the choice to decide the dilemma of both morality or immorality which is depicted by Claudia's leaving-home, a carefully thought-out plan. Readers expected her to support herself or separate from her parents. We have seen that Mrs. Frankweiler thinks that Claudia wants to change by leaving-home, but Claudia doesn't. Claudia just wanted to try her talent, and see if she could survive by herself or not. As Tribunella mentioned, this story would be Mrs. Frankweiler's story, Claudia was just one of her pieces, no matter how children are invoked. Here we see the gap of morality and immorality between children and adults in *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. There is a new style of morality and immorality in this story, and it is one of the attractions of this book, but unfortunately Konigsburg wrote her story giving attention to Mrs. Frankweiler. At a result, children's books were just one of the tools of preaching to the child, and educate them for adulthood, but it has changed by the appearing new children's books style like *From the Mixed-Up of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* or *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These books have similar elements: first, it was written for children and also adults' nostalgia. Second, it proposes more freedom of crossing between 'morality' and 'immorality'. Both of these stories are closer to children, and it raised children's possibility of development for the next generation. Finally, children's literature is not only for children. There are so many invisible issues of both children and adults. Same as Claudia, her problems still remains even when the story ended. Mrs. Frankweiler and Konigsburg did not face their problems rather she hides this problem intentionally.

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