

The Semiology of Callousness as Illustrated on Yukio Mishima's *The Swaddling Clothes*

Johanes Claudio Perdana Napitupulu¹, Dimas Eko Saputro², Rommel Utungga Pasopati^{3*}, Yoshua Veron Handika Putra Siadari⁴

¹ Student of English Literature Program, Dr. Soetomo University, Surabaya, Indonesia

² Student of Magister of Literature, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³ Student of Magister of Literature, Petra Christian University, Surabaya, Indonesia

⁴ Student of English Literature Program, Dr. Soetomo University, Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: rommelpasopati@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Literature reflects symbols of meanings in human beings' life. The meanings are so psychological that closely related to deeds of characters as studied by semiology by Ernst Cassirer. The Swaddling Clothes is a short story by Yukio Mishima written in 1955. It tells about a wife who imagines the future of an illegitimate newly born baby wrapped in newspaper full of blood stains as swaddling cloth. Her husband is also callous by stating that the situation is hilarious, while she keeps in mind otherwise. She seems to overthink the baby, but actually that situation indicates disparity of society. Then, how is callousness illustrated on Yukio Mishima's The Swaddling Clothes? Through qualitative method on cultural studies, this writing explains callousness is not only psychological deed, but also reflection of condition of society. By accentuating Cassirer's theory on semiology, ignorance depicts superiority of own values by deteriorating otherness. Modernization brings in different situation to Japan as asserted by Mishima. Poverty is widespread and the rich evades mutual relations with other class. While there are privileged babies with high moral standard, there are undernourished babies who have to struggle to live by embracing violence. In conclusion, the story shows callousness as matter of social clash rather than merely denial of everyday anxiety. That ignorance is degradation of moral shaped by modernization that removes appreciation to other people.

Keywords Callousness, Ernst Cassirer, The Swaddling Clothes, Yukio Mishima

INTRODUCTION

The Swaddling Clothes is one of Yukio Mishima's short story that tells about a woman who takes care of the illegitimate newly born baby of the new nurse of her house. In Mishima's writing, he wants to make a strong narrative subject which means a character who will know about what will happen in the future, especially the future of the baby that she takes care of (Mishima, 1955). The uniqueness of this story is that Mishima uses a woman as the main character as the main part of the plot of the story. While a lot of Japanese stories are played by men, Mishima makes a woman as the main character who experiences the conflict a most. This story directly explains what happens with the Japanese babies born after war. This story presents the Japanese's experience of the Second World War and the Modernist Western Culture (Mishima, 1955).

Mishima's fiction presents the presentation of love and future. For the love side, Mishima shows the readers in *The Swaddling Clothes* that a woman is always having qualities of a mother, yet she takes care a poor baby with love without thinking twice (Mishima, 1955). For the future side, Mishima tells the readers that even people are still in a present, they can see the future by the object of what they have seen before. For example, when Toshiko, as the main character, wants to know about what happens with the baby in the future, it explains when there is a tragedy that directly explains what will happen with the baby (Mishima, 1955).

This paper would like to analyze the problem of callousness through theory of semiology in Yukio Mishima's *Swaddling Clothes* and explains about how callousness (Unemotional-traits) is indicated by the people who have low social awerness. When a person embrace low social awareness, he or she does not care about what happens with the people around him or her (Dewangga, et al., 2024; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2017; Oktavia, et al., 2023). So in general, callousness has a meaning that the people who do not care about what happens with another people around them. Callousness has a similar meaning with anti-social behavior. Callous-unemotional (CU) traits is predicated by the problems in affective theory of mind that antisocial issue is showing low empathy, remorse, and guilt (Dewangga, et al., 2024; Djanarko & Pasopati,

2017; Oktavia, et al., 2023). This paper is having such purpose to explore and explain the correlations between callousness and matters of semiology in Yukio Mishima's *Swaddling Clothes*.

METHOD

By using qualitative method, the concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through explorative perspective, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between *The Swaddling Clothes* and Semiology of Callousness of the story. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters. The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references. Each of them is read then broken down into its every particular element. The plots and settings of the short story are mainly involved to point significant condition of *The Swaddling Clothes*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Chronicles of Callousness in Post-War Japan

The Swaddling Clothes is the short story that explains about the relationship between Toshiko and the illegitimate newborn baby. There are various facts that underline such prolonging indifferent deeds among characters in the story. Those quotations are listed as follows.

“Earlier that evening, when she had joined her husband at a night club, she had been shocked to find him entertaining friends with an account of “the incident.”” (Mishima, 1955).

The above quotation shows the beginning before the main conflict. It starts when Toshiko and her husband go to the night club and meet with her husband's friends. In this part, the incident means something that is very unpleasant before Toshiko's eyes. She would like to refer an event in her house that is very bad in reality, yet her husband takes it merely as a funny story. An event that is shown in horrific situation is yet driven as trivial idea by Toshiko's husband.

“Here this new nurse for our baby arrives from the employment agency, and the very first thing I notice about her is her stomach.” (Mishima, 1955).

The conflict directly arises with a little conversation. It is about a news of a new nurse that is pregnant. A word that should to be noticed by the readers on this scene is *“...the very first thing I notice about her is her stomach.”*. The stomach will be the clue what will happen on their house later. On a hand, it is quite common for a woman to be pregnant at any time. However, on the other hand, the pregnancy is out of any normalcy. Later, Toshiko's husband really undermines the nurse by saying bad words about her. The bad words are not only spoken to the nurse, but also re-told by the husband to his friend in a club he attends that night.

“It's enormous as if she had a pillow stuck under her kimono! No wonder, I thought, for I soon saw that she could eat more than the rest of us put together.” (Mishima, 1955).

The conflict starts to arise by such bad presumption within. Toshiko's husband tells all of his friends about the description of the new nurse who comes to his house. He describes all of the aspect of the nurse especially her body. He does the body shaming on her by understating her body. Body shaming can be defined as inappropriate negative statements and attitudes toward another person's weight or size (Nénot, 2024; Schlüter, et., al., 2021). When the writers look at some words; *“she had a pillow stuck under her kimono!”*, and *“...she could eat more than the rest of us put together”*, it is directly concluded that the nurse is pregnant. However, the pregnancy is shown as such a mocking for the nurse as if she were a monster ready to eats up everything. The husband even impliedly says that the baby inside her womb is nothing but fat as if the baby is not an important being.

“Well, the day before yesterday we heard groans and moans coming from the nursery. We rushed in and found her squatting on the floor, holding her stomach in her two hands, and moaning like a cow.” (Mishima, 1955)

This scene explains about the moment when the nurse starts having contractions to give birth of her baby. Toshiko's husband tells to all of his friends the condition of the nurse but with funny senses. And for sure, he retells the story with the bad words, the words that actually must not be used for the human. The words of "*and moaning like a cow*" have a body shaming meaning that action or practice of humiliating someone by making mocking or critical comments about their body shape or size (Cardinale & Marsh, 2020; Schlüter, et. al., 2021). By stating so, the husband defines the nurse merely as animal, not a human being.

"Next to her our baby lay in his cot, scared out of his wits and crying at the top of his lungs. A pretty scene, I can tell you!"
(Mishima, 1955).

Finally, the baby is born. This scene tells the readers about the condition of the place and how the baby is crying. Nevertheless, the bad thing is seen when he says, "*A pretty scene, I can tell you!*". It also represents about how dare and bad he is. It also showing how callousness is seen in this scene. A woman cries for her baby coming out from her womb is such an eerie situation. People should feel sorry for the nurse rather than mocks her. However, the husband thinks otherwise (Mishima, 1955). He still thinks that the nurse is such an animal and giving birth is a funny scene for him. Meanwhile, his friends think that what he speaks is just a fiction he makes regardless any sense he shows to the story.

"...she saw the newborn baby lying before her: on the parquet floor the infant lay, and his frail body was wrapped in bloodstained newspapers." (Mishima, 1955).

This scene talks about the bad thing that is happened to the baby. Toshiko looks at the baby, but unfortunately, the baby is wrapped in the bloodstained newspaper. It is the main peak of callousness in this story. It is also a direct reflection of the title of this fiction. In this sense, it is almost impossible for a newborn baby to be wrapped in a newspaper. It is such humiliation to a newly born being in this world. No one cares for the baby, but Toshiko does (Mishima, 1955). Later, Toshiko hurries up to her room, looks for thick clothes, and wraps the baby so that he does not catch cold while his mother is still catching her breath.

"As if to emphasize his scorn for this mother who had given birth to a bastard under such sordid conditions, he had told his assistant to wrap the baby in some loose newspapers, rather than proper swaddling." (Mishima, 1955).

When the baby is born, the doctor tells his assistant to wrap the baby in some newspapers. When Toshiko looks at what the doctor did on the baby, she feels the callousness treatment that offends her (Mishima, 1955). On the other words, the doctor is also callous since he knows that the baby is a bastard, he is illegitimate and should not be much appreciated. This is such a betrayal to human right since he is a doctor that should always serve all beings without any exception.

Callousness and Cassirer's Semiology

Semiology of callousness is a pattern of knowledge that underscores the unemotionality traits by some people to the other by looking on the symbols, pictures, and gesture in the story. The main problem through emotionality is about the empathy. It is the capability to understand and share the kindness to each other's, and plays a fundamental role in some interactions of society (Andersch, 2023; Branchadells, et al., 2024). Empathy also can build skills to understand about the feeling, emotion, and thinking of the people. It also can make the people care to each other. In this sense, the sign of emotional pattern is about shaping ideas through empathy. It reflects signs within interactions among human beings as the main key to further understandings (Badir, 2024; Keunen, 2020).

Then, lack of empathy would explain the problem of psychopathic individuals to harm and violate the rights of others and their lack of insight and remorse for their actions (Andersch, 2023; Branchadells, et al., 2024). Showing an experience in pain is a signal that the people can get the attention and promote caring and protective social functions. Generally, empathy in psychopathy has also focused on pain, that can make the brain is network could play a crucial role in empathic capabilities (Branchadells, et al., 2024; Nénot, 2024). The semiotic method and the callousness theory in this article can make the readers understand about what kind of callousness in this story.

Semiology is the study that explains about the meaning of sign and symbols in some articles. For example, it analyzes the sign of symbols such as pictures, gestures, words, and so on. Semiotics is indeed both a theory and a methodology that can be applied to a variety of texts, including novels, paintings, films, buildings, websites, and even clothing (Andersch, 2023; Aiello, 2020; Wijaya, et al., 2023). Semiology makes the writers and also the readers understand about the functions and meanings of the story. Anything can be a sign as long as someone or a group of people who are part of the same culture or society interprets it as a signifying something. In this sense, any sign is generated consequently altogether with ideas of meanings (Badir, 2024; Keunen, 2020). Semiotics is not only a study about the signs but also it studies the deep meaning inside the word.

Furthermore, there is a crucial difference between semiology and semiotics. Those rely on the target or the object of analysis of them. Semiology works more in ideas of interactions among people (Badir, 2024; Keunen, 2020). This aspect is more social since any kind of sign is related to how any people applies it socially as well. There is no single sign that is individually built. Through this sense, sign is the social symbols in which any kind of value is intact within. Semiotics then is more general than the former. It includes any kind of sign as its matters of structural point of view (Badir, 2024; Keunen, 2020; Smarandreeha, et al., 2024). It also describes that language as a structure or system of signs, which people respond in a predictable way and the sign consists of a signifier and signified. Signifier is as sound-image and signified is meaning or concept. Simply put, semiotics is a study that speaks signs in its meanings in the main structure. Later on, structural points of sign studies are also including ideas of further sense of language both in grammar and its practice in wider everyday life.

Semiotic analysis is the pattern that make the hidden structures, the code of culture, and dominant meanings of such texts both visible and invisible can be understand clearly. On the other side, semiotics is also a powerful knowledge for a systematic study and critique of ideology in visual communication. In the *Swaddling Clothes* story by Yukio Mishima, the readers will see that there are many kinds of gesture, iconic moment, and tragedy that have been explained on the story by the words. A lot of material may take on the symbolic roles that make a popular meaning about an iconic image (Innis, 2023; Lanigan, 2023). Through matters of semiology, any kind of meaning regarding this story is easier to be consumed since it already symbolizes any kind of idea both in societal and individual matters.

Semiology expands perspectives of sign through expressive, representative, and signifying matters of semiotics (Innis, 2023; Lanigan, 2023). The expressive part shows how any kind of sign is external since it shows meanings to the other side. It is an expression from something towards other things. The representative part explores how signs give meanings in its intrinsic aspects. It shows idea of representations in which one aspect speak of the other through its internal attributes. The signifying matter is about to point out something towards other senses of other meanings as well. This is more active than the former ones since this aspect is more complex by underlining the relationship between the physical form of signs and the meaning of signs, as well as the social, and psychological factors (Innis, 2023; Lanigan, 2023). It works more than in concepts, but also in contexts as it could expand the understandings of meanings related to given signs.

Callousness is the field of study that explores the phenomenon of how individuals develop a lack of empathy towards others on an emotional level. Within the realm of psychology, discussions on callousness often focus on its relationship with personality traits and tendencies towards antisocial behavior. It is observed that individuals lacking in empathy and guilt tend to exhibit behaviors that involve disregarding social norms and the rights of others. Research has established a direct link between callousness and the manifestation of aggressive conduct (Nénot, 2024; Štulhofer, 2021). A person characterized as callous typically demonstrates minimal concern regarding the impact of their words or actions on others, displaying insensitivity towards the suffering or challenges faced by those in their vicinity. This lack of concern is not necessarily malicious, but rather reflects fundamental disconnect from the emotional experience from others. Their emotional response is muted and leaving others around feeling unseen and unheard.

The concept of callousness holds significance in the examination of conduct disorder and psychopathy as well. Callous traits encompass behaviors such as displaying cruelty towards others and experiencing a lack of remorse for one's actions, which are components of a broader spectrum of callous-unemotional and psychopathic traits (de Graaf, et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020). Individuals with callous-unemotional traits often exhibit indicators of antisocial behavior, including aggression, deceit, and an absence of empathy. These traits can manifest in younger individuals and potentially escalate into various forms of antisocial conduct. A comprehensive comprehension of the theory of callousness is crucial for identifying individuals who may be prone to engaging in antisocial behaviors, as well as for disseminating

knowledge aimed at fostering empathy and encouraging positive social growth (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020; Névot, 2024).

Signs of Prolonging Callousness in Mishima's Fiction

Swaddling Clothes by Yukio Mishima is the short story that presents about the callousness. The callousness in this story can be seen with the many kinds of symbols, gestures, and tragedy moments. A word becomes meaningful for someone when the writer uses that word an object as its meaning. To understand this short story, Mishima uses the semiology pattern. In *Swaddling Clothes* story, there are three people that have been indicted as the suspects of callousness with the problems that they have done in the story. The suspects are the husband of Toshiko, the Toshiko husband's friends, and the doctor. Those three characters are the opposite of the attributes of Toshiko herself in which her empathy is shown slightly different from the former three (Mishima, 1955).

In this section, the points of expressive, representative, and signifying of semiology of callousness are used. In expressive semiology, there are the relationship between the physical form of signs and the meaning of signs, as well as the social, and psychological factors (Innis, 2023; Lanigan, 2023). In analyzing an expressive semiology, the people might study the emotions, or messages that might have the meanings of words or sentences that could be a context, that explaining the communication meaning, because semiology can be seen by the interactions among people (Badir, 2024; Keunen, 2020).

On the story, it is seen that on the second line of the first paragraph, it says "*But what else could a woman expect when she married an actor—an attractive one?*" (Mishima, 1955). In this line, Yukio wants to tell the reader that the husband of Toshiko is an actor. Besides an actor, the husband also mentions as 'an attractive one'. So, the husband of Toshiko is a famous actor and on the high level of society. The psychological factors are mentioned in the third line of fourth paragraphs. It says "*It's enormous as if she had a pillow stuck under her kimono! No wonder, I thought, for I soon saw that she could eat more than the rest of us put together*" (Mishima, 1955). In this line, the writers conclude that this the part of the character that shows the callousness. The husband does the body shaming on the babysitter and he says that the babysitter stomach is 'enormous. Enormous is also the expressive of the semiology since it points out to pregnancy born by the babysitter. For what has been done by Toshiko's husband, he represents a sense is generated consequently altogether with ideas of meanings (Badir, 2024; Keunen, 2020).

There is another line, especially on the seventh line of the fourth paragraph, it says "*We rushed in and found her squatting on the floor, holding her stomach in her two hands, and moaning like a cow.*" (Mishima, 1955). And the other scene, there is fifth line of the sixth paragraph, it says "*The whole time the girl was yelling like a stuck pig.*" (Mishima, 1955). These lines are the moment when the baby will be born soon. 'Moaning' is the expression to show how hurt she is. But when the husband says "moaning like a cow" and "yelling like a stuck pig", the husband currently does the body shaming.

The people who already in the high level of society, they usually say something that can hurt the feeling of the people without feeling guilty at all. Most of them use their unemotionality traits as their jokes to other people and they laugh on it (Mishima, 1955). In this scene, Toshiko's husband is also the symbol of modernity in which it has affected Japan after Second World War finished. As the one who loses the war, Japan must surrender to Western armies which later also shapes not only the government, but also the civilization of this nation. In another sense, Japan is getting modern, but it also slowly leaves its traditional values of appreciating people (Mishima, 1955). Modern people of Japan tend to follow European and American styles that are used to undermine other people from other classes. In this story, the mother and the baby are the victims of modern change in Japan at that time as being symbolized by Mishima.

Beside the husband of Toshiko, his friends are also showing how they express their imagination based on the story that he says. It can be seen on the first line of the fifth paragraph. It says "*So the cat was out of the bag?*" suggested one of their friends, a film actor like Toshiko's husband." (Mishima, 1955). He does not say about a cat, but a person. There is another line that showing the callous point of unemotionality of his friends. It can be seen on the first line of the seventh paragraph. It says "*Oh, that I'm sure of!*" said another of their friends, and the whole company burst into laughter." (Mishima, 1955). They are laughing like what they are thinking is true. They show their unempathetically traits by laughing to it.

The friends of Toshiko's husband show such callousness since they could not differentiate between imagination and reality. Indeed, they are included in a circle of performers. However, they speak like they were the best of the world that could undermine anything under their feet. They laugh as if the story is such imagined reality, not the imagination itself (Esparza, 2023; Meyer, et al., 2023). Their social life in a bar or

a café shows that they are also part of modern life in which every single part of their life is nothing but full of definitions and progress.

The definitions will always be shown since modern people will accentuate one side and degrade the other (Innis, 2023; Lanigan, 2023). The friends in this story underline that they must be different from other people, including those who are poor. Therefore, laughing when hearing such poor story is funny for them. They are getting not only callous, but also never takes care of other people outside their own circle. Modernism is also thick in this story since it defines self and put them away from taking care of otherness furthermore (Esparza, 2023; Meyer, et al., 2023).

The progress is how the friends show that modernism is their way of life. Staying together until midnight is such progress in which further jobs may come through. They live towards better futures, but what they actually reach is nothing but glamor part of life (Esparza, 2023; Meyer, et al., 2023). Therefore, they could never see what another feel as well. In the following story, Toshiko's husband leaves Toshiko to stay with his friends. In this sense, the husband even takes more care to his friends rather than with his wife. It is quite abnormal, but for those who upheave such hedonism then it could be usual after all.

The last, the doctor is also showing his callous-unemotional traits to the babysitter. It can be seen on the second line of ninth paragraph. It says "... *he had told his assistant to wrap the baby in some loose newspapers, rather than proper swaddling.*" (Mishima, 1955). 'He' on this scene is the doctor. He said to his assistant to directly wrap the baby with the newspapers. The doctor does it because the baby is a bastard. 'Bastard' has a meaning that the new baby born has no legitimate father. The doctor does not have any empathy and leave out his responsibility as a doctor to protect everyone with the pure of heart (Mishima, 1955). He is more loyal to the classes with more money but tends to be so cruel but showing the unemotional treatment to the poor patients.

In this sense, the doctor's callousness is such betrayal to his ethics as the one who does medical service. A doctor should always take care of the patient and give everything in order to realize better deeds to the patient. However, the doctor tells the nurse to cover the newborn baby in old newspaper. This is such dehumanization in which such doctor must never do anything like that. Doctor is such reflection of the prioritization of human beings regardless any kind of difference that anyone sees (Mishima, 1955). In this case, either the baby is illegitimate or legitimate, the doctor must apply the same procedure, that is to comfort the baby and the mother as well. His callousness is the worst since it contains his ethical aspects both as a doctor and as a human being as well.

Then, communication always occurs with the mediation of signs, where the signs are the basis of communications, and semiotics is the most instrumental approach in the study of sign (Esparza, 2023; Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020). Communication is the key to understand what kind of callousness appeared in the story and how the callousness can be represented. It can be seen from the husband of Toshiko that make a fun with the new baby-born on his house, the husband's friends that are laughing very hard, and the doctor that wraps the baby with the newspapers. It begins from the husband of Toshiko that always leave Toshiko alone at home and leave with his friends. On the second line of the first paragraph, it says "*Even tonight he had to dash off to an appointment, leaving her to go home alone by taxi.*" (Mishima, 1955). And on the first line and second line on the last paragraph, it says "*They left the night club and Toshiko stepped into the taxi that her husband had called for her*" and "... *he told the driver and shut the door from the outside.*" (Mishima, 1955). From this line, it could be concluded that the husband does not care much with his wife, Toshiko.

He is always busy with his works, ignoring his wife, and does not want to know what will happen with his wife. His treatment showing the representation that he does not take the responsibility as a husband. Second, the moment when the husband and Toshiko were in the night club and telling the story with his friends. On the second and third lines on the fourth paragraph, it says, "*Here this new nurse for our baby arrives from the employment agency, and the very first thing I notice about her is her stomach. It's enormous as if she had a pillow stuck under her kimono! No wonder, I thought, for I soon saw that she could eat more than the rest of us put together.*" (Mishima, 1955). In this line, the husband represents what happens with the babysitter. The babysitter is pregnant but he explains it with the body-shaming. The way Toshiko's husband is laughing, his friends are laughing too. On the on the first line of the seventh paragraph, it says, "*the whole company burst into laughter.*" (Mishima, 1955). Their laughter can be a representation of callousness because laughter represents a strong social signal (Cardinale & Marsh, 2020; Ethofer, et al., 2019). His friends are laughing for something that they did not know. But in this case, the unemotional thing is that the friends did not know that what the husband tells is a true story.

The baby who gets wrapped by a newspaper also be a representation of callousness in the story. It can be seen on the second line of ninth paragraph. It says "... he had told his assistant to wrap the baby in some loose newspapers, rather than proper swaddling." (Mishima, 1955). When the baby was born, the doctor asked to the nurse to wrap the baby with the newspaper. Wrapping the baby with a newspaper means that the baby is unimportant because the baby was born without knowing who is the father of him, or on the other word as a bastard of unknown father.

CONCLUSION

Swaddling Clothes by Yukio Mishima is a story full of callousness done by the characters. Through Cassirer's semiology, it is understood that callousness is never about individual, but social as it is always related to other people. There are points of callousness in this story; the husband of Toshiko that make a fun with the new baby-born on his house, the husband's friends that are laughing very hard, and the doctor that wraps the baby with the newspapers. Those aspects indicate a lack of empathy for others through various signs and symbols of expressions and dialogues. Through semiology, callousness could be more understood as it underscores the communication, representation, and interpretation served by unethical deeds done by the characters on the story.

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