

**THE EMPRISES OF CLUSTERING ILLUSION AS DEPICTED IN
GUY DE MAUPASSANT'S *THE CHRISTENING***

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Abstract. Psychological perspective is widely used today in literary criticism. Guy de Maupassant's *The Christening* is one short story related to clustering illusion through psychological point of view. Clustering illusion is seeing things in logical ways. The question is; how is clustering illusion be depicted in Guy de Maupassant's *The Christening*? By using qualitative method, cultural concepts are used to explain the story in clustering illusion. Things that are so logical then are abandoned in this short story because of religion, custom, and alcohol matters. By comparing the reality and the logic of the doctor as the story teller, clustering illusion reflects how things that are easily predicted could be really different from reality. Here, tensions between modernity ideas and cultural concepts are contradicted. Modernity which is full of prediction, progress, and individuality is challenged by customary understanding known best by people. In conclusion, the story teller experiences clustering illusion; what he thinks as logical in an action resulted after another is not as it is because of custom that honor habitual culture above anything else.

Keywords: *Clustering illusion, custom, Guy de Maupassant, religion, The Christening*

INTRODUCTION

The Christening is a short story by Guy de Maupassant released in 1885. It was first published as *Le Baptême* and translated into English afterwards. The story tells a tragedy caused by alcohol consumption in a family (Maupassant, 2013). There is a doctor who is asked to be a godfather for his gardener's newborn child. The doctor presumes that everything will be alright from the sacramental ceremony at church until they return home. However, the cold weather attacks the mother and her child almost to the death, while her husband and his siblings enjoy drinking alcohol as a custom of celebration outside their house. The child then died and the mother passed away too because of such negligence by alcoholic consumption by the family (Maupassant, 2013).

Indeed, this story is famous in the themes of the danger of alcohol consumptions. Maupassant massively underlines his distrust to various institutions, including religion and civil matters (Mambrol, 2019). Worsened by the existing custom of alcoholic culture, people have abandoned many things including themselves and their own families. Besides, there is another unique

perspective about the role of the doctor or the godfather of the child. He seems to face such clustering illusion; a psychological assumption that sees things as predictable and logical but actually are not so continuous and consistent at all (Blanco, 2017a).

This aspect will be explained further by the writers. Then, how is clustering illusion be depicted in Guy de Maupassant's *The Christening*? By using qualitative method, cultural concepts are used to explain the story in clustering illusion. Things that are so logical then are abandoned in this short story because of religion, custom, and alcohol matters. By comparing the reality and the logic of the story teller, clustering illusion reflects how things that are easily predicted could be really different from reality.

METHOD

By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Online and offline scripts are used to explain analysis of Guy de Maupassant's *The Christening*, clustering illusion, and how tensions between modernity and culture are drawn. Online and offline scripts are derived from books, journals, and online resources to understand shown matters. The data analysis include attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Inexact Subsequent Events in The Christening

The story of *The Christening* by Guy de Maupassant tells about a navy doctor's experience of a flashback event. The theme of the story is about alcoholism and its culture in society. Alongside with that theme, subsequent events are faced by the doctor which he believes they are exact but actually they are out of his predictions. There are five main sequence of events related to the story. First, the doctor is asked by his gardener to be godfather for his child. He could not say no to the request. He even gives ten francs for the cost of the christening (Maupassant, 2013). The doctor seems to believe his servant's and gardener's family since he lives alone there. He even gets closed to them as they also help him in many matters in his life. It can be said so since he takes care for that family so much even though he lives in an individual society of Western world. However, that individual perspective is the main key of his main problem as he does not really know how to behave between the tensions of being individual and communal.

Second, the time for christening ceremony comes. The gardener, named as Kerandec, knocks the doctor's door house and asks him to come together to the church. The weather is cold since it is in January when the snowy season reaches its peak. The doctor is worried about the child who has to bear that severe cold weather. His worry is worsened when they arrive in front of the church and find the place closed. The priest is late and they have to wait outside the church. Suddenly, the baby is put down without nothing on his body. The doctor protests as it may kill the baby due to cold weather. But then he could not do more since it is said to be a custom of the society as anyone must stay bare before God during the ceremony. This event indicates how the doctor pays more attention to the baby

but he could not do more about the custom. He wants to take care more to the family but the custom hinders it. He argues with Kerandec about the decision to leave the baby naked in the middle of the snow. He does a protest and uses his power to threaten the family to pick up the baby from the snow. In this case, the doctor rejects the custom but he only does an intervention while leaves the custom as it is. The doctor conflicts with Kerandec in how to be a good man and a good father (Aubry, 2008).

Third, the priest is coming slowly to the church. The doctor says to him about the baby, but the priest could not do more because it is a custom. The ceremony starts outside the church with the baby is still naked. As the ceremony ends, the doctor asks the family to go home and comfort the baby in warm to avoid pneumonia. He then enters the church with the priest to sign a letter as he is the godfather. The priest asks for five francs for the ceremony but the doctor refuses. Both argue and threaten each other but then the doctor surrenders and pay the money. In this event, the doctor is so angry with the priest. He does not take care much for society by prolonging a bad custom of christening for a baby in the midst of snowy season. He even gains more advantages from the ceremony by asking money even he is a patriarchal symbol of the church (Aubry, 2008). The doctor hates the custom but once again he could not do more about the custom and leaves it as it is.

Fourth, the doctor returns then visits Kerandec's house. He finds the mother of the baby shivers while Kerandec and others leave the house to drink alcohol to celebrate the christening. He is furious of Kerandec's action leaving his family in cold condition and using his money to buy the drinks. He asks the nurse to cook a broth and to build fire for the mother and the baby, then he goes home and sleeps (Maupassant, 2013). Here, the doctor must face another bad side of custom in that society for alcohol consumption. Custom of celebration is put forward while condition of family is left behind. Moreover, the doctor only does intervention in giving hot food and fire but nothing more. He still leaves the custom as it is.

Fifth, his servant wakes the doctor up at the daybreak and tells him that the child dies. Kerandec and his siblings have returned and comforted the mother who cries all day long. They comfort the mother by giving her drinks, not brandy or other usual alcoholic drinks, but wood alcohol used to lighten the lamp. He runs fast to Kerandec's resident, he finds the family is drunk together alongside with the mother and the nurse, and he sees the mother is not feeling well too (Maupassant, 2013). At last, the mother dies too towards noon. This last event shows how the doctor's actions regarding the custom reach its top. He is angry but he is late. He sleeps by leaving the custom as it is. That deed indirectly brings both the mother and the baby to death. His intervention does not matter anymore since the baby and his mother whom he pays attention more are gone.

Those above plots assert the bad aspect of alcoholism in a society. The existence of custom alongside with themes of religion and celebration worsen the alcohol consumptions. However, the doctor tells the story while enjoying his glass of brandy or cognac. He hates the custom and he thinks that he has acted much as he could but actually it is not quite enough since the baby and his mother are dead. From that story, two main themes can be derived as the central ideas. One is from

the title itself that reflects the existence of custom and religion in the society. The ceremony is important for the religion but it contains flaws including the priest's greed and people's ignorance of their family in the middle of celebration. Another one is the term of alcohol that is consumed as usual in that society. The alcohol is the main problem here since drinking will ignite more ignorance and negligence of people. It affects people's minds by being careless from their surroundings.

Furthermore, while those two themes underline custom of christening and alcohol consumption (and also to blame those two as the main causes of problems), there is a perspective different from those. It is the perspective from the doctor itself that is brought to this paper either. The doctor fails to see inexact subsequent events (Blanco, 2017a) in that story. He thinks that everything is predictable in his mind and his intervention is enough to amend the situation. He does not see the whole aspect from the side of the christening custom and the alcohol consumption. Although he cares much to the family, he does not dive in to the habit of the family and the society. He is still in another world different from Kerandec family's state of minds.

Clustering Illusion and Unpredictable Situations

Human beings tend to make everything in order and to avoid chaos. It seems logical if things are seen in order. This order is not only sequences, but also cause-effect aspects, patterns, and even close resemblance of a thing to another. In this case, approaching order and evading chaos is rational either since those are realized in human minds through correlating vast issues to other narrow ones (Howard, 2019). Being rational then includes cognitive aspects that show how body and mind connect each other to percept surrounding things. In reverse, human minds are tricky. Every person is blessed with rational mind, but somehow the conclusions of such logical premises may be incorrect. As reflected in syllogism, every aspect may contain various elements that could always indicate incongruities with realities. From major and minor premises to conclusions, all of them may spot different perceptions alongside with opinions.

Biases then are indicated as how things are not in line with reality. Mind is used to play in order so that it will become main point of all (Ross, 2014). It does not matter if the premises or the conclusions are wrong as long as those are logical and rational as well. Even mind likes to find patterns in such random coincidences. However, since each aspect is related to others, the incorrectness will bring different consequences in the future. Therefore, it is always necessary to check and to re-check each premise so that it may result to logical conclusion too. In this case, every human being is fragile to biases in mind so that everyone may experience and get trapped in logical fallacies too (Blanco, 2017a). Syllogism is not meant as perfect method for perfect conclusions made by perfect minds. Each conclusion derived is meant to be inspected again and again to fix any certain errors that human makes.

In psychology, cognitive bias is widely discussed to show how human minds may create faulty conclusions. Introduced by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in 1972, cognitive bias is a phenomenon as a result of choice based on preferences that may set aside other different information (Ross, 2014). Here,

preferences only tend to liking such issues and eliminating other factors. Those factors may be the important or even the beneficial ones but being overridden only to promote own favorites. The fancy of something may overshadow the real ideas of such premises. The bias then asserts how human identities play big roles in reaching such conclusions. The identities may upheaval religions, level of educations, ideologies, living circumstances, including tastes and experience. Then, to find such truth, any cloudy minds must be brightened to collect exact premises and correct conclusions. Being rational must push aside subjective validations, selective perceptions, expectation bias (Blanco, 2017b).

Cognitive bias may happen in both conscious and unconscious mind. Nevertheless, people tend to shape biases unconsciously since consciousness is used to love orders (Blanco, 2017a). Then, what is stated below surface affects more to conclusions. Someone may conclude things easily, not because he or she has mastered wide varieties of knowledge, but because he or she has abundant presuppositions of things in his or her minds. In many times, he or she does something consciously by holding on unconscious minds. He or she does not have to ask others for doing such actions since he or she already has assumptions in his or her minds (Howard, 2019).. The assumptions may be true or wrong but those are inevitable. People could not do things out of own assumptions and totally relies on others. He or she has his or her own backgrounds of experience that enrich abilities to perform premises and conclusions.

Clustering illusion is a cognitive bias that tends to find such patterns in irregular situations and conditions (Blanco, 2017b). The situations and conditions may not be random at all but the patterns drawn may not be correct too. In other words, seeing patterns of cluster in random things is an illusion. It is since human beings prefer order and that perspective is used to see chaotic (or even only unstable) random data. The order is related to main idea of consistencies; how a perception may appear the same as before, how something may be seen as a cause that brings effect to other, and how an issue is compared to others (Mambrol, 2019). Those three aspects are the main illusions that indicate patterns ‘considered as rational’ rather than ‘the real rational patterns’. While rational patterns really show the data, the correlations, and the cause and the effect, clustering illusion plays in the realms of assumptions and perceptions altogether with imagination of the unconsciousness. Despite playing on those two unstable and quite changing bases, assuming and perceiving are the main initial logical and rational understanding of things (Blanco, 2017b).

The illusion in seeing a cluster is considered an error in reasoning. It is flawed by depending on personal beliefs that being rather more subjective than objective. It may become behavior if the cluster is seen continuously as trend that slowly shapes logics. It could become such stereotype that overemphasizes randomness as an order (Syafriana, 2020). Assuming a cluster that exists actually have good impacts especially to help being positive, to make sense of randomness, and to explore various chances that may come. Somehow, it may shape better imagination either to free minds to see unimaginable things although it may result to fantasy or even delusion (Ross, 2014). Saying something that may not be as coincidence at all may not be an error. Some unique solutions may come

from connecting coincidences (Blanco, 2017b). Even saying that a cluster in random data is an illusion may be an error too.

The process of finding knowledge or epistemology could be explored by searching certainness in randomness. Subjectivity is even the source of objectivity. Finding normalcy in abnormal things may be needed today either. It may be flawed as it is natural as human beings, but through nature is how humans nurture themselves (Aubry, 2008). On a hand, assuming a cluster is an error, but on the other hand, it may result to creativity that is unimaginable before. Besides, a cluster that is seen is natural may be shadowed by identities and preferences in the concluded results. Those tensions are the reflection of the existence of clustering illusion (Blanco, 2017b). In this case, psychology touches realm of cultural studies by widening perspectives to social and individual issues. It may not be equal to compare astrology with finding truth of knowledge, but both of them go through the same roads. Astrology forecasts things from continuous consistencies of attitudes of people while epistemology predicts a conclusion by doing experiments because of multiple data too. Those two may not be in the same level, but the meaning of cluster as illusion could cover various values of real and forecasted truths in human beings' life. Both may study the same matters; biases of everyday life (Ross, 2014).

Modern and Cultural Tensions in *The Christening*

Today, literature has expanded through widened aspects of language. Language is not only mode of communication but also every single side of everyday life. It is then no more singularly possessed by literature but it is floating as intermediary among disciplines of knowledge (Blanco, 2017b). Literary criticism as analysis of the literature is also vastly affected. It becomes more interdisciplinary due to existing language today. Theories of literature are enriched by other concepts including philosophy, law, politics, psychology, economic, health, and so on. Methods have been enhanced by cultural studies to show bodily, structurally, and power-related meanings. Since language is reflection of everyday life, so the perspectives may be vary too departed from literature and cultivated by other natural and social sciences of knowledge.

Psychology is one perspective that ameliorates literature recently. Abundant kinds of literature are widely enhanced by this discipline from old to new ones. Especially through analysis of minds, psychology supplements literature to assert psychic aspects including anxiety, fear, guilt, defense mechanism, psychoanalysis, grief, and others. By underlining psychology in literature, map of minds could be attained as advantages to show how an event may affect deviance of elements of literature involving character, plot, setting, point of view, and many else (Finn, 2017). Moreover, including psychology in literary criticism also shows that literature is never about free-value, but always tends to any social and natural conditions even power-related or includes dominant-subordinate conditions and situations.

Through explanation of clustering illusion above, the doctor in the story of *The Christening* faces that situation. In simple words, he thinks that everything is in order and if there is any deviant of event, his little intervention could fix the

order. He cares to Kerandec's family, but he neglects ideas that his idea and Kerandec's world is crucially different. He assumes that Kerandec family really understands health condition while they do not. Instead of being a closed relative and a caring doctor, he chooses to leave the family to its custom of society (Aubry, 2008). He may appreciate private matters of the family, but his negligence to the custom has resulted to the worst outcome, that is death. He does not want to intervene more to the ceremony of the christening or even the massive alcoholic consumption. He presupposes that an event must be followed by another in a sequence of order. He figures such clustering illusion in random event. The event is remained as random because of two main reasons; it does not follow the doctor's prediction and the doctor actually lives in different world from Kerandec's. He predicts everything is fine but it is not. He supposes that the family will limit alcoholic consumption but they do not. He lives in own individual perspective, but Kerandec and his family embraces communal point of view.

The cognitive bias that the doctor experiences is tension between his conscious and unconscious mind. In his conscious level, he understands that there are many things going wrong. The priest in the process of christening or baptism should not ask for money for the ceremony. The baby should not be put down biting cold weather on the snow. Kerandec should not leave his baby and the mother catch cold while he celebrates the christening by drinking alcohol somewhere. The mother should not be given wood alcohol to console her after she lost her child. The mother also is seen only as a person (or object) who could do nothing in the story (Syafrina, 2020). The mother must live under gazes of patriarchal symbol of Kerandec and the doctor. He understands that there are many injustices and irresponsibility that he faces in the process of christening. However, he shows few actions as a doctor and close relative of Kerandec. He only asks the nurse to bring the baby up and to put him in a blanket then gives the mother broth to warm her. He is aware of things that should not be so, but he only does small interventions. Furthermore, his gestures are actually reflections of his unconsciousness (Blanco, 2017b).

In his unconscious level that results to the error, the doctor sees such pattern that he assumes it as an order. The pattern is such unconscious reflex that the doctor does not aware in doing bad thing (Finn, 2017). It can be seen that after he knows that Kerandec and his siblings go out to celebrate to drink then he still does nothing. The reasons behind that thought could be assumed to reality that the doctor lives through individual perspective. He does not think that the custom may bring harm to them. He still cares to that family but only to several matters. He still believes that the family could survive on their own. He thinks that the harm for the baby in the process of the christening is only a consequence of such bad single action. He presumes that the family may do something wrong once and will not do another again. Actually, it is matter of modern and cultural tensions here. In modern aspect, the doctor shows how he believes that Kerandec will do anything for his family and push aside anything else that may bring bad aspects to them. As a doctor, he also believes that the baby will be better soon. Clustering illusion reflects how things that are easily predicted could be really different from

reality. Modernity which is full of prediction, progress, and individuality is challenged by customary understanding known best by people (Aubry, 2008). The doctor thinks that Kerandec's action is just a deviant but that action is based on custom that he does not really understand at all. He has lived for a long time in that area with Kerandec but still he does not quite embrace the culture. He still holds on to his own perspective rather than tries to understand (and makes a change) to the custom. He knows he could intervene more but he leaves the family in the midst of society's stereotypes (Syafrina, 2020).

There is an interesting part of the story that needs to be emphasized. It is when the doctor decides to go home from visiting Kerandec's family and then sleeps (Maupassant, 2013). Indeed, he may be exhausted because of the cold weather. He may also want to feel such warmth in his own house too. However, he chooses to sleep though he understands that Kerandec is wrong by leaving his baby and the mother in cold at home. He quite comprehends idea that the custom of drinking as celebration is not good at all. But he rather sleeps than tries to find Kerandec and to ask him to go home. Here, it can be seen how the doctor knows bad aspect of the custom but still holds to his own individual matter by going home and sleeping. His idea to sleep is also quite irrational regarding to his role as a doctor. He absolutely may have ignored his instincts in the sense of logic (Finn, 2017). He only gives warm broth to the baby and the mother and not doing any diagnose furthermore. He does not give any other suggestion or even medications or herbs to make them warmer and healthier. Moreover, while he sleeps, he misses many things including (that also result to) the death of the baby and then the mother too. His caring to the family is limited only to his role as employer of Kerandec. He does not intend to get closer to the family even though it is only for the survival of the baby.

Maupassant's story is indeed magnificent and full of chances for readers to interpret wide varieties of meanings. The story is well read as a text. The clustering illusion faced by the doctor could also be emphasized through other two aspects; deniability and element of surprise. The doctor's position to the christening ceremony and the customary alcoholic consumption reflects his ability to deny. He quite grasps realities of 'what it should be' and 'what it should not be' (Blanco, 2017b). Kerandec should take care more to the family and avoid regular alcohol consumption in any celebration. He also apprehends conditions of 'it is as it is' and 'it is as it should be'. Custom of the society should not bring wound to the persons although it may include religions and everyday culture of the people (Mambrol, 2019). Those two assumptions that the doctor quite really puts deeply in his mind then speaks his freedom for doing several interventions (or even doing nothing) in the behalf of his own gestures. He denies his own ability to change the custom through Kerandec's actions. At the results, his deniability comes to the death of the baby and the mother in the latter.

Element of surprise is also seen in this story according to the doctor's shock to the deaths of the two persons. As he sleeps, he predicts that everything will return normal again. However, his predictions is out of sense. He thinks that his intervention is enough but it never be. The situation is considered as predictable for him but then it is quite unpredictable since he actually does not really know

what is going on. He assumes that his thought, Kerandec's mind, and the baby situation is in accordance while any deviant will return to normal condition later. Nevertheless, his prediction grasps the unpredictable. His prediction of images has met the illusion of reality (Howard, 2019). Kerandec does multiple wrongdoings rather than only single one. The doctor catches open air that means nothing. His prediction fails and evolves to a shock surprised by the deaths. The biases in the doctor mind shape ultimate unexpected condition in the latter (Ross, 2014). There are two choices of arguments for this existence of element of surprise; the doctor does not really what is going on or he actually neglects the reality that actually exists while being surprised by the surplus of the event. On a side, if he does not really know about anything, then he totally lives in different world compared to Kerandec's realm. He is individual at all and plays role only as employer. He never cares about the custom of the people or the area that he lives in. His individual thought is really the opposite of the communality embraced by people through the custom at that time.

On the other side, the doctor is doing such negligence by letting things go as they are. He predicts things will return to normal since he believes that thing will do its matter by itself. It is likely as absent-minded that can be derived from his ease in telling the story while drinking brandy. It seems like he still cares but he does not intend to do more than what he has done before. His clustering illusion is living in his individual comfort zone and watching pseudo-predictable order (Ross, 2014) on communal society of the unpredictable. Indeed, his shock to the deaths of the two people is due to his negligence of the unpredictable. He is shocked by how the event may inflate to such surplus and bring in such uncanny events. He then still holds to his negligence by assuming that drinking alcohol is normal. What is abnormal is Kerandec's action that chooses to celebrate by drinking alcohol than to care to his own family. He does not really curse alcohol consumption since he only detests the unpredictable impacts of it.

CONCLUSION

Putting clustering illusion as an alternative theme of Maupassant's story gives wider perspectives of literature. Seeing things as psychological may bring in questioning ideas of what remains logical and rational. Literature then could also finds its ongoing enhanced complexity. Indication of this story to speak about alcohol and christening ceremony are accompanied by tensions between the conscious and the unconscious minds involving conflicting modern and cultural aspects. What the doctor thinks as logical in an action resulted after another is actually never as it is. It is due to customary behaviors that honor habitual culture above anything else. Modern aspects tend to be individual and full of progress and predictions, while custom as traditional matters holds on to identities of people practiced through every space and time. (cf. Susanto & Andayani, 2021).

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