



**ACTIVATION OF EMPATHY, FEELINGS IN
RAYMOND CARVER'S *A SMALL, GOOD THINGS***



Shri Prashant Chanaraddi

Assistant Professor, Department of English

Shri K. A. Lokapur Arts, Science and Commerce College, Athani

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the way Raymond Carver depicts empathy in his well-known short story "A small, Good things". Carvers' used minimalism to portray the communicating between the characters. This story represents two situations in which cognitive empathy is generated .One Dr. Francis awareness about Ann's mental state

alleviates he suffering. Second one when at the end of the story Ann and her husband tell the baker the news of their sons death. It shows cognitive empathy toward each other through identification of their mental states.

KEYWORDS

Emotion, Empathy, Sympathy

RESEARCH PAPER

After looking through a loose-leaf binder with photographs of cakes taped onto the pages, Ann and her son approached the shop and ordered chocolate cake, which was child's favorite. The cake she chose was decorated with a spaceship and launching pad under a sprinkling of white stars, and a planet made of red frosting at the other end.

The baker of the shop was not jolly. There were no pleasantries between Ann and baker, just the minimum exchange of words, the necessary information. He made her feel uncomfortable, and she didn't like that. While he was bent over the counter with the pencil in his hand and Ann studied his coarse features and wondered if he'd ever done anything else with his life besides be a baker. She was a mother and thirty-three years old, and it seemed to her that everyone, especially someone the baker's age—a man old enough to be her father and must have children who'd gone through this special time of cakes and birthday parties. There must be happened between them, she thought. But he was abrupt with her—not rude, just abrupt. Next day while the birthday boy was going to school without looking, the birthday boy stepped off the curb at an intersection and was immediately knocked down by a car. He fell on his side with his head in the gutter and his legs out in the road his friend dropped the potato chips and started to cry. Scotty walked home, and his friend went on to school and the birthday boy was inside his house and was telling his mother about it.

The mother was sitting beside him on the sofa, holding his hands in her lap, saying, "Scotty, honey, are you sure you feel all right, baby?" It shows Ann's love and she hurried to the telephone and called her husband. Now Howard told her to remain calm, and then he called an ambulance for the child and left for the hospital himself he kissed her on the forehead, and they touched each other hands. In the hospital she sat in the chair beside the bed and looked at the child. She was waiting for him to wake up and be all right. Then she could begin to relax Scotty had been hit by a car and was in the hospital, but he was going to be all right. Howard closed his eyes and ran his hand over his face. He went into the kitchen and poured himself some whiskey. He called to the hospital to know the condition of the child but the child's condition remained the same; he was still sleeping and nothing had changed there. While water poured into the tub, Howard lathered his face and shaved. Ann still sat in the chair beside the bed and waiting for the child recovery. She looked up at Howard, and then she looked back at the child. The child's eyes

stayed closed, the head was still wrapped in bandages. Dr. Francis ordered that the child needs nourishment he needs to keep up his strength. Meanwhile Ann asked her husband that Why doesn't he wake up, Howard? I don't understand, if he's all right or not. Now Dr. Francis came in and shook hands with Howard, though they'd just seen each other a few hours before. Ann got up from the chair. "Doctor?" Then the doctor turned back the covers and listened to the boy's heart and lungs with his stethoscope and he went to the end of the bed and studied the chart. The doctor was a handsome, big-shouldered man with a tanned face. He wore a three-piece blue suit, a striped tie, and ivory cuff links. His gray hair was combed along the sides of his head. "He's all right," the doctor said. "Nothing to shout about, he could be better, I think. But he's all right. Still, I wish he'd wake up. He should wake up pretty soon." But he's all right, believe me, except for the hairline fracture of the skull. Ann thought more serious regarding her child, "It's a coma," Ann asked the doctor. "It's not a coma yet, not exactly," the doctor said. I'm certain his condition will show improvement by morning. When doctor said condition of the child Howard touched the child's temples and his own breathing had slowed. "I think he's supposed to feel this way right now," he said. "He's in shock, remember? That's what the doctor said. The doctor was just in here. He would have said something if Scotty wasn't okay." Ann stood there a while longer, working her lip with her teeth, it shows the curiosity of the mother to know the health of the child. Then she moved over to her chair and sat down. Howard sat in the chair next to her chair. Howard picked up her hand and squeezed it.

They sat like that for a while, watching the boy and not talking. "I've been praying," Ann said, Howard nodded. All I had to do one thing close my eyes and say, 'Please God, help us-help Scotty,' and then the rest was easy. "I've already prayed," he said. "I prayed this afternoon-yesterday afternoon, I mean-after you called, while I was driving to the hospital. The same nurse came in and took the boy's pulse again.in an hour another doctor came in he said his name was Parsons, from Radiology. He had a bushy moustache. "We're going to take him downstairs for more pictures," he told them, "We need to do some more pictures, and we want to do a scan." "What's that?" Ann asked. "A scan?" She stood between this new doctor and the bed. "I thought you'd already taken all your X-rays." "I'm afraid we need some more, he said." Nothing to be alarmed about. We just need some more pictures, and we want to do a brain scan on him." "My God," Ann said. Its normal medical procedure, and nothing to be alarmed about. We'll be taking him down in a few minutes," this doctor said. They were black-haired, dark complexioned men

in white uniforms, and they said a few words to each other in a foreign tongue as they unhooked the boy from the tube and moved him from his bed to the gurney. Howard and Ann got on the same elevator.

Ann gazed at the child. She closed her eyes as the elevator began its descent. Without a word to them, she took blood from the boy's arm, Howard closed his eyes as the woman found the right place on the boy's arm and pushed the needle in. "Why won't he wake up?" Ann asked. "Howard? I want some answers from these people." Howard didn't say anything. He sat down again in the chair and crossed one leg over the other. He rubbed his face. He looked at his son and then he settled back in the chair, closed his eyes, and went to sleep. You can count on that. But all of his signs are fine. They're as normal as can be." "It is a coma, then?" Ann said. Go and have yourselves something to eat." "I couldn't eat anything," Ann said. "the doctor said. "Anyway, I wanted to tell you that all the signs are good, the tests are negative, nothing showed up at all, and just as soon as he wakes up he'll be over the hill." he said. "Let's try not to worry. You heard what Dr. Francis said." She stood in her coat for a minute trying to recall the doctor's exact words, looking for any nuances, any hint of something behind his words other than what he had said. She tried to remember if his expression had changed any when he bent over to examine the child. She remembered the way his features had composed themselves as he rolled back the child's eyelids and then listened to his breathing. She went to the door, where she turned and looked back. She looked at the child, and then she looked at the father. Howard nodded. She stepped out of the room and pulled the door closed behind her. She went down the corridor the man had indicated and found the elevator. She waited a minute in front of the closed doors, still wondering if she was doing the right thing.

Then she put out her finger and touched the button. She pulled into the drive way and cut the engine. She closed her eyes and leaned her head against the wheel for a minute. She listened to the ticking sounds the engine made as it began to cool. Then she got out of the car. The dog ate in hungry little smacks. It kept running into the kitchen to see that she was going to stay. As she sat down on the sofa with her tea, the telephone rang. "Yes!" she said as she answered. "Hello!". "Yes, yes! What is it?" she said. "This is Mrs. Weiss. This is she. What is it, please?" She listened to whatever it was in the background. "Is it Scotty, for Christ's sake?" "Scotty," the man's voice said. "It's about Scotty, yes. It has to do with Scotty, that problem, Have you forgotten about Scotty?" the man said. Then he hung up. She dialed the hospital's number and

asked for the third floor. She demanded information about her son from the nurse who answered the telephone. Then she asked to speak to her husband. It was, she said, an emergency. "Scotty's fine," Howard told her. "I mean, he's still sleeping. There's been no change. "You know what I mean," he said. "Juice, something. I don't know. I don't know anything, Ann. Jesus, I'm not hungry, either. Ann, it's hard to talk now. I'm standing here at the desk. Dr. Francis is coming again at eight o'clock this morning. He's going to have something to tell us then, something more definite. That's what one of the nurses said. She didn't know any more than that. Honey, maybe we'll know something more than. Meanwhile, I'm right here and Scotty's all right. He's still the same," he added. "Dr. Francis was here a little while ago," Howard said. She looked at him closely and thought his shoulders were bunched a little. "I thought he wasn't coming until eight o'clock this morning," she said quickly. "There was another doctor with him. A neurologist." "A neurologist," she said. Howard nodded. His shoulders were bunching, she could see that. "What'd they say, Howard? For Christ's sake, what'd they say? What is it?" "They said they're going to take him down and run more tests on him, Ann. They think they're going to operate, honey. Honey, they are going to operate. "Oh, God," she said. "Oh, please, Howard, please," she said, taking his arms. "Look!" Howard said. "Scotty! Look, Ann!" He turned her toward the bed. The boy had opened his eyes, then closed them. He opened them again now.

The eyes stared straight ahead for a minute, then moved slowly in his head until they rested on Howard and Ann, then traveled away again. They leaned over the bed. Howard took the child's hand in his hands and began to pat and squeeze the hand. Ann bent over the boy and kissed his forehead again and again. The boy looked at them, but without any sign of recognition. Then his mouth opened, his eyes scrunched closed. "An autopsy," Howard said. Dr. Francis nodded. "I understand," Howard said. Then he said, "Oh, Jesus. No, I don't understand, doctor. I can't, I can't. I just can't." Dr. Francis put his arm around Howard's shoulders. "I'm sorry. God, how I'm sorry." He let go of Howard's shoulders and held out his hand. Howard looked at the hand, and then he took it. Dr. Francis put his arms around Ann once more. He seemed full of some goodness she didn't understand. She let her head rest on his shoulder, but her eyes stayed open. She kept looking at the hospital. As they drove out of the parking lot, she looked back at the hospital. At home, she sat on the sofa with her hands in her coat pockets. Howard closed the door to the child's room. He got the coffee-maker going and then he found an empty box. He had thought to pick up some of the child's things that were scattered around the

living room. But instead he sat down beside her on the sofa, pushed the box to one side, and leaned forward, arms between his knees. He began to weep.

She pulled his head over into her lap and patted his shoulder. Someone unlocked the door and opened it. The baker stood in the light and peered out at them. "I'm closed for business," he said. "What do you want at this hour? It's midnight. Are you drunk or something?" She stepped into the light that fell through the open door. He blinked his heavy eyelids as he recognized her. "It's you, he said." "It's me," she said. "Scotty's mother. This is Scotty's father. We'd like to come in." "What do you want?" the baker said. "Maybe you want your cake? That's it, you decided you want your cake. You ordered a cake, didn't you?" "She clenched her fists. She stared at him fiercely. There was a deep burning inside her, an anger that made her feel larger than herself, larger than either of these men.

There it sits over there, getting stale. I'll give it to you for half of what I quoted you. No. You want it? You can have it. It's no good to me, no good to anyone now. "My son's dead," she said with a cold, even finality. "He was hit by a car Monday morning. We've been waiting with him until he died. Ann wiped her eyes and looked at the baker. "I wanted to kill you," she said. "I wanted you dead." "Let me say how sorry I am," the baker said, putting his elbows on the table. "God alone knows how sorry. Listen to me. I'm just a baker. I don't claim to be anything else. Maybe once, maybe years ago, I was a different kind of human being. Sorry for your son, and sorry for my part in this," the baker said. "Smell this," the baker said, breaking open a dark loaf. "It's a heavy bread, but rich." They smelled it, then he had them taste it. It had the taste of molasses and coarse grains. They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. It was like daylight under the fluorescent trays of light. They talked on into the early morning, the high, pale cast of light in the windows, and they did not think of leaving.

WORKS CITED

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