

Have you ever had that eerie feeling in the back of your mind that something just is not right? It is as if there is some unknown reason that a situation has a different meaning than what is obvious. This feeling is the disguised backbone of Raymond Carver's story, "Boxes". In this story the son seems to be experiencing this feeling as his mother decides to move again. There are gaps in the story line which shows that the son's dialog does not match up with his thoughts throughout the situation. These gaps highlight a hidden theme that associates the son's feelings about his mother moving with her death.

One of the reasons the son unconsciously believes he will never see his mother again, is because his mother mentions more than once in the story that she would like to die. These gaps in the story where the mother mentions dying in the same scenes that have to do with her moving associates her moving with her death. One instance that she mentions dying is where she is complaining about the weather in Longview: "I mean it, honey. I don't want to see this place again except from my coffin. I hate this g.d. place. I don't know why I moved here. I wish I could just die and get it over with" (p. 413). I do not think the son believes she really wants to die but she puts the idea of her dying in his subconscious. There is a gap at that point that is up to the reader to figure out.

The gap is widened farther in that same scene. The son remembers thinking about a man working on a power line. The man leaned out supported only by a safety belt and the son thought about if the man fell. The son is still on the phone with his mother: "I didn't have any idea what I was going to say next. I had to say something. But I was filled with unworthy feelings, thoughts no son should admit to. 'You're my mother,' I said finally. 'What can I do to help?'" (p. 413). What were these thoughts? Why doesn't the narrator tell us? The son cannot help being affected by these powerful words of his mother. This gap in the story is important because the son is thinking about how that man working on the pole could easily die if his safety belt does not hold. At this point he also has unmentionable thoughts about his mother. Because of this gap, the reader can assume that these thoughts concern his mother dying. Because his mother mentions death, he starts thinking about her dying which continues through the rest of the story.

There were apparent gaps again later in the story when her son becomes upset when discussing her moving and his mother says: "I wish I could die and get out of everyone's way". (p. 421) Again she brings up the topic of her dying. We do not know why he was upset or exactly why she wants to die but we find it is connected to her moving back to California. What is also important is that she says this in response to him getting upset. If for some reason he never saw her again, it would stay with his conscious that she had felt this way because of his actions.

At the last dinner that the son eats with his mother, it really hits him that she is leaving. He realizes he cannot stop her and that this may be the last time he sees her: "I understand that after she leaves I'm probably never going to see her again" (p. 421). This passage opens up the son's mind to us because if he believed that she was just moving then he would not be convinced that he would never see her again. The gap caused by this passage shows that the son thinks he will never see her again even though she is supposedly just moving.

The son is convinced by the scene where his mother leaves: "Two days later, early in the morning. I say good-bye to mother for what may be the last time" (p. 422). For the son, this is a very powerful moment. It is like watching someone die, without being able to do anything about it. His mother has made up her mind and he cannot do anything to change it. It is not as if he consciously knows he will never see her again; in that case he could tell her why she can not leave. It is just an awful gut feeling.

This gut feeling is less obvious in other scenes of the story which make it more important. As the mother leaves that morning for her trip back to California, the son notices her appearance:

My mother holds my arm as I walk her down the steps to the driveway and open the

car door for her. She is wearing white slacks and a white blouse and white sandals. Her hair is pulled back and tied with a scarf. That's white, too. The white color the mother is wearing signifies heaven. Angels and God are always known to wear white and so it is associated with heaven. The narrator includes this because it associates her leaving with going to heaven. Still, the son does not know for sure that he will never see her again, it is just an eerie feeling which we are aware of because of the gaps in the story.

These hidden meanings in the story which come from the gaps, make up the true meaning of "Boxes". The character's dialog indirectly tells us what they are thinking. The part of the story when Jill, the son's wife, supports the mother's decision, clearly shows the relation between the mother's moving with her death: "I hope you have a safe trip back and you find the place you're looking for at the end of the road" (p. 418) We, as readers, are supposed to believe that Jill meant at the end of her road trip but, we are also supposed to recognize this as a reference to the mother's death from Carver.

These gaps in the story are not careless errors by the author. Raymond Carver placed these in the story on purpose to give the reader a sense of seeing what is not there. By leaving gaps we get a similar feeling to the son in the story. We realize that the reason he will probably never see her again after she moves is because Carver leads us to know that her moving is associated with her death. Without the narrator ever saying "The son will never see his mother again because she is going to die", we still get that from the text. This fits with Carver's style of writing because the reader can never tell until the end of the story what the meaning is. In the case of "Boxes", the reader must read through the story and pick up on these gaps and what they mean before piecing together what Carver is trying to accomplish.