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# Humour, Emotional Sustenance and Affective Care in Phoebe Potts’s *Good Eggs*

**Dr. V. David Arputha Raj**

*Assistant Professor*

*Department of English and Foreign Languages*

*Bharathiar University, Coimbatore*

## Abstract

*Despite the technological advancement in healthcare with the intervention of robots in care units replacing human care, the lack of visceral connection in posthuman care technologies has become a serious concern. With the healthcare system becoming more and more commercialized, human connections and affective care for patients has become a challenge. Graphic pathographies underscore the significance of non-human entities as emotional caregivers to humans particularly during illness through comic affordances. The affective relationality between animals and human beings have become compatible entities when compared to posthuman care technologies. With reference to Phoebe Potts’ Good Eggs, a graphic memoir about infertility experience, this paper analyses the zooeyiac care provided by Phoebe’s cat, the non-human entity. This paper unravels the humor, emotional support and care provided by the pet as a prospective stand-in for humans. By analysing selective panels from Potts’ Good Eggs, the paper debunks the idea of anthropocentrism in medical care and stresses how human-animal coexistence can aid emotional well being during times of mental agony relative to physical health concerns.*

**Keywords:** Zooeyia, Affective Care, Emotional Entanglement, Interspecies Relationality.

## Introduction

The human-animal entanglement in Good Eggs is subtle and inexplicit that represents the idea of zooeyia. Zooeyia is a term used to describe the positive health benefits of companion animals, especially pets, on human well-being. It comes from the Greek word “zōion” meaning animal, and “Hygeia”, the goddess of health. “The concept of zooeyia centres around interspecies relationality and entanglement, challenging the prevailing notion of human supremacy” (Venkatesan and Ancy 4). Though human care is given a larger picture in Good Eggs, the interspecies relationality between the couple and the pet Reuben makes up the humor and solace at times of adversity. During Phoebe’s moments of hopelessness and failure, when Jeff is physically absent, she is consistently accompanied by Reuben, whose playful presence brings comfort in the midst of the traumatic situation. The visual affordances of the memoir makes the ground for the author to embody the presence of the cat while incorporating other significant events within a single panel. The human- animal interaction, though humorous, creates a significant impact in the physiological and psychological health of the couple.

### **Analysis of Good Eggs - Pet as Care Object**

“Futures of Care: Care Technologies and Graphic Medicine” delineates the “affective necessities and desires of the care receiver” (Venkatesan and Ancy 642) which is empathetic that robots cannot provide as they are designed with objective programmed instructions common to every patient. Visual depictions of animals as care objects in graphic memoirs highlight how humans, within an anthropocentric framework, are able to externalize their pain and express their emotions through words and actions to non-human companions more freely and without the complications often present in human interactions. The core of human-animal relationalities rely on the “emotional connection and recognition of and response to the emotional needs of the care recipient” (Ventakesan and Ancy 642). Interaction with pets during emotional tribulations gives man the superiority to thrust one’s emotions on a human-like yet non-judgemental living creature that might not completely comprehend human emotions.

“Graphic Medicine disrupts the “objective” case study, exploring the myriad ways that health and disease can be represented in Graphic form” (Williams 3). The subjective experience of female infertility is embodied through Phoebe Potts Graphic memoir Good Eggs. The visual affordances of the graphic medium elevates the role of the zooeytiac care provided by Phoebe’s pet Reuben. The presence of Reuben near Phoebe during her troubling situations underscores the interspecies relationality as a necessary aspect during illness.

Phoebe Potts Good Eggs is a humorous graphic memoir that portrays the struggle, disappointments and heartbreaks of the couple Phoebe and Jeff who undergo infertility treatments to attain parenthood. The emotional toll of the tiring infertility treatments, the self-doubts and the emotional resilience accompanied with humor makes the graphic memoir an interesting yet disturbing one. The role of the pet cat Reuben throughout the graphic memoir signifies the human-animal relationality both emotionally and physically. Reuben as an epitome of care provides resilience to the couple. It emphasizes the fact that “the scope for prospective research on zooeytiac care suggests the importance of human-animal bonding, especially in the context for caregiving” (Venkatesan and Ancy 3).

The couple finds solace in the presence of the pet Reuben and identifies it as their kid which is evident through their interaction. The memoir begins with Phoebe patting Reuben’s head while pondering her father’s opinion on the previous day’s newspaper. This is followed by Reuben sleeping on the edge of the couple’s bed peacefully while Phoebe is worried, dreaming of her infertility. This visual representation of the thoughts of the cat Reuben and Phoebe in the same panel symbolises the dissatisfaction and worriedness of the human mind. The presence of the cat Reuben throughout the narrative gives comic relief. The presence of Reuben in the narrative during emotionally challenging situations highlights the significance of the pet as a member of the family. Reuben stands as a care object in the struggling phase of Phoebe and Jeff as “Care objects are items or entities that occupy a special place in the lives of the ill or disabled, offering comfort, solace and emotional sustenance” (Venkatesan and Ancy 2).

The muttering of Reuben about food when Phoebe reads a historical book about female infertility reinforces humour and normalcy into the graphic narrative (X). The coincidence of the name Reuben meaning “BEHOLD! A SON!” makes Phoebe excited which she believes is “more than a coincidence” (X). Jeff joins her, reassuring that Reuben is “really a baby stand-in”(X) for the couple. When Phoebe gets the news from the doctor through a call that her hormone levels are inadequate for pregnancy, Phoebe is frustrated and sits in a chair in front of her computer with dejection. Reuben enters the room and gets over the table and sits near Phoebe. The silence and stillness of Phoebe and Reuben sitting alongside each other signifies the solace offered by the pet (141).

This memoir challenges the anthropocentric lens of traditional caregiving by showcasing interspecies relationality as a potent source of emotional support. It critiques the sterility and insufficiency of technologically mediated care by emphasizing the irreplaceable value of presence, touch, and emotional resonance found in non-human relationships. Potts' use of comics not only makes these themes accessible and poignant but also contributes to the larger discourse of graphic medicine by advocating for an expanded understanding of care.

In the afterword, Phoebe gets reminded of her childhood playtime with her dog that chases her in the field behind her house. When Phoebe falls in the middle of the high grass, the dog smells her scent and spirals her around to find her. "Instead I would compare myself to the dog: each path I took, each choice I made circled me in on my target" (245).

This nostalgia of the childhood where the dog spirals around her to the centre relates to the understanding of destiny to phoebe. The memory of the dog and the eventual realization of the philosophy of life by Phoebe highlights the positive impact that human-animal relationality provides. The resilience, hope and emotional sustenance provided by animals as good companions to human folk is an undeniable thematic significance in this memoir.

## Conclusion

In *Good Eggs*, Phoebe Potts masterfully interweaves humor and emotional depth to capture the complex journey of infertility, underscoring the often-overlooked but vital role of non-human companions in providing affective care. The presence of Reuben, the cat, offers both comic relief and emotional sustenance, serving as a quiet yet constant source of comfort amid medical disappointments and existential despair. Through visual storytelling, Potts effectively conveys the intimate, almost therapeutic, companionship between humans and animals, making Reuben not just a pet but a stand-in for the child they long for, and a witness to the emotional trials the couple faces. The cat becomes a subtle symbol of hope, humor, and healing—a zooeyiac caregiver whose very existence brings light to the darkest moments. *Good Eggs* thus becomes a testament to the healing potential of humor, the necessity of affective connections, and the quiet power of animals in navigating the fragile terrains of illness and identity.

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