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Narrative Time in Jennifer Egan's A Visit From the Goon Squad

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Abstract:

This paper is intended to reveal some of the features of narrative time in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011) by Jennifer Egan (born 1962). In 2011, this novel has received many prestigious prizes including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. Egan's novel has been applauded by many critics such as Bill Adams who writes that "Egan is a master of time management, one of the most powerful tools a novelist has (Bill Adams)." Since this paper is an attempt to unfold some of the features of narrative time in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (later will be referred to as *Goon Squad*).

Key Words: Narratology, analepsis (flashback), prolepsis (flash-forward), *Goon Squad* , narrative, anachronism, ellipsis





Though there are many articles and a few dissertations written on *Goon Squad*, the novel can still be dealt with from different critical points of view, which will be hinted at in the conclusion of this paper. Some of the articles and dissertations that dealt with *Goon Squad* are Olivia Laing's critical essay "A Visit from the Goon Squad" about the novel's plot, Pankaj Mishra's London Review of Books entitled "Modernity's Undoing," about the technicised society, the polyphonic novel and time, Virginia Pignagnoli's Ph.D. dissertation *Paratexts 2.0: New Perspectives on Twenty-first Century Literary Narrative*, tackling the impact of new technologies on Egan's characters, Jessica Tomberlin's M.A. thesis *The Hostess*, in an attempt to show *Goon Squad's* prodigious effect on Tomberlin's novel *The Hostess*, and Elizabeth Buzard's critical essay "Understanding the Role of Time in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*," about the effect of time on the main characters in the novel. Buzard's study, in this regard, concentrates on the unruly impact of time on the characters in Egan's novel. Since this paper mainly concentrates on narrative time as one of the main features of narratology in *Goon Squad*, it is perhaps the first paper to invoke the nonlinear technique in the novel.

Part of the significance of the interrelation between time and the novel lies in the way time keeps hold of the fictional characters. Egan herself coins the dictum 'time's a goon' in order to personify time in her fiction and to show to what extent time is important though it is not one of the characters in her novel. Hence, it is mandatory to refer to the chronological order of a series of events in a novel. E. M. Forster argues that a narrative is a series of events, which is arranged according to time sequence "dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on (Forster 27)."

Fludernik observes that important narratologists, Genette for instance, have paid much attention to what they call anachrony or the violation of the chronological order in a work of fiction. An example of such violation is flashback, which theorists



call 'analepsis'. Fludernik mentions the reasons why analepsis or anachrony in general is used as a framework of a novel. She says that analepsis occurs when the protagonist recounts some events s/he remembers. Sometimes, analepsis is used to supply the reader with the reasons why some 'unexpected events' take place. As Fludernik also observes, analepsis is simply recognized when the author in a traditional novel shifts to the 'pluperfect (past perfect)' (Fludernik 34)." Noteworthy is the fact that the customary tense in a novel is the past tense although the present tense in many examples of narration as is the case in sports reports can be found (Fludernik 51)."

Again, narratology as a theory does not aim at criticizing a specific traditional form of a work of art. Quite the contrary, narratology mainly concentrates on works of art, based on experimentation. Fludernik observes that narratologists are concerned with "new trends in narrative, such as the introduction of chapter headings, or with the often playful modifications of the epistolary novel during the eighteenth century, and of course the newest strategies of experimental novels (Fludernik 16)." It is also stated that "Narratology gives us, among other things, the tools to identify and describe narrative techniques more precisely, and thereby to consider their implications and significance in more nuanced ways (Fludernik 312)."

In this paper, we will concentrate on time structure. The importance of time structure in narrative is really inexorable. Fludernik stresses this fact when she argues that "the structuring of the narrative in time is another very important element (Fludernik 32)." Adam Abraham Mendilow in his book *Time and the Novel* asserts that "novelists, not only of today but of all periods, should busy themselves with the various aspects of time, when most of the conventions and techniques of fiction are so closely bound up with them (Mendilow 17)." To mention just a few of the novelists all over the world who have busied



themselves with the time structure in their fictional works, Mendilow observes:

Mann and Kafka in Germany, Proust, Gide and Romain Rolland in France, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Gertrude Stein, Cabell and Thomas Wolfe in America, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley and J. B. Priestley in England, these are but a few of the well-known novelists who belong to what the enemy of the school, Wyndham Lewis, has labelled: 'The Time-school of modern fiction' (Mendilow 31).

To study linearity in a work of fiction means that we have to put into consideration that there is a stark difference between story time and plot time. Fludernik stresses the fact that "discrepancies between story time and discourse time must also be taken into account (Fludernik 32)." Needless to say that rare is it to see the events in a fictional work go side by side with what happens in our everyday life. In this regard, Silber says: "Compressing time is what all fiction does-it's very rare that the words on the page correspond to real time. We're told life is short but art is long, but life in its daily form takes up more time (Joan Silber 21)."

Mendilow also stresses the same point that the time one spends in reading a novel is quite different from the story time the fiction author manipulates in his fictional work. In Mendilow's words: "During a few hours of reading, one imaginatively lives through a period of time that may stretch for anything from centuries to minutes (Mendilow 71)." It is quite apparent that the reader may spend a few hours in reading a novel the time span of which may extend to years or decades. In her book *The Art of Time in Fiction*, Joan Silber remarks that "It's the fiction writer's task to put the reader through the strangely desirable misapprehension that three decades have passed during the five hours it took to read certain pages (Joan Silber 7)." It is also worth noting that the fiction author puts at



the back of his/her mind how much time he/she needs to accomplish his/her work of art. Joan Silber asserts that "Tradition, resistance to tradition, private experience, and innate belief go into any author's choice of how many imagined minutes or years a story needs to make itself clear and felt (Joan Silber 7)."

It is significant then to stress the fact that Henry James many a time alludes to the importance of the time structure in a work of fiction. Mendilow observes: "The reason for this desire to get to grips with time, is clearly, as Henry James more than once suggested, that time in its various aspects is a major conditioning factor in the technique of the novel (Mendilow 16)."

We can say, then, that the restructuring of time is an essential element in the work of the novelist. In other words, every work of fiction has its own clock as E. M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel* plainly puts it:

[I]n a novel there is always a clock. The author may dislike his clock. Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights* tried to hide hers. Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*, turned his upside down. Marcel Proust, still more ingenious, kept altering the hands, so that his hero was at the same period entertaining a mistress to supper and playing ball with his nurse in the park. All these devices are legitimate, but none of them contravene our thesis: the basis of a novel is a story, and a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence (Forster 29-30).

Worthy of note is that the duration of fictional time in a fiction work has nothing to do with the length of the work itself. The fictional time in a short story may extend to embrace a longer period of time than that in a long novel as is the case with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (216 pages; Publisher: Mariner Books; 1st edition (1990) and Chekov's "The Darling" (14 pages <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/Darl.shtml>).



Silber makes it clear when she says: "'The Darling' is simple, tight, and brief, but there is also a tradition of the novelistic long story that stretches over years of fictional events-a story that is stuffed with time and characters (Joan Silber 24)." Writers who resort to compressing time in their works of art assiduously attempt to let time be ample to encompass the events mentioned in such works. Silber shows to what extent a novelist spares no pains or effort to trim time so that time can fit their works of fiction when she argues: "An exact transcript of a simple everyday conversation would go on for pages. Writers are always trying to contain an unruly mass, to get time trimmed to fit within borders (Joan Silber 21)." Before discussing time in *Goon Squad*, we have to briefly touch upon the novel's structure.

Egan's novel comprises two parts A and B, which, in turn, are divided into thirteen chapters: Part A encompasses six chapters while Part B embraces seven. Each chapter seems to be like a separate short story, but there is a fine thread that unifies all the thirteen chapters in that characters are linked in one way or another with respect to the time structure. As Buzard puts it when she pinpoints that all Egan's characters in *Goon Squad* "have experienced a seemingly sudden battering at the hands of time (Buzard 2)." Buzard also emphasizes the fact that Egan concentrates on the lives of the characters who overtly seem to be more important than plot itself. What makes Buzard underscore the importance and personification of time is Egan's statement in the novel that 'time is a goon'. From this dictum coinage, Buzard launches her criticism denoting that the personification of time "is extremely important to the understanding of the work as a whole (Buzard 3)."

In *Goon Squad*, the protagonist of a chapter never becomes a protagonist in any of the other twelve chapters. In her critical article in *Newsweek*, Jennie Yabroff asserts that "*A Visit From the Goon Squad* is not the first novel to be arranged as a collection of only tangentially related stories, but it does feel like the first novel to be structured like a Facebook page (Jennie



Yabroff)." In *BOMB Quarterly*, Heidi Julavits asserts that Egan's novel is "better understood vertically than horizontally. It establishes, without question, that she is one of the most significant living practitioners of the art we call fiction (Heidi Julavits)." That the novel could be 'better understood vertically than horizontally' is due to the fact that it is a nonlinear narrative. Jessica Tomberlin asserts that Egan's novel's structure "is also done in this elliptical, non-linear style (Tomberlin 17)."

Narratologically, Jennifer Egan in her novel *Goon Squad* does not adhere to the traditional rules of writing fiction. In one of her interviews, she says, "Actually, I don't really care too much about genre (Alec Michod)." It is not only Jennifer Egan who dispenses with the conventional rules of writing fiction, but many other novelists did the same. Lawrence Sterne (1713-1768), James Joyce (1882-1941), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014) are just a few among others. Mendilow stresses this point when he argues that Sterne is "everywhere in his masterpiece considering how and why he intends to reject the entire scheme of conventional fiction (Mendilow 18)."

It is, then, worth observing that Egan does not belong to a certain group of authors, or a specific literary movement. This is perhaps the reason why Alfred A. Knopf overtly describes her as "one of our boldest writers (Knopf)." In an interview with Richard Abowitz, Egan also adds that during writing *Goon Squad*, she has had no model in mind (Abowitz 7)". Egan, again in her interview with Killian Fox, hints that she is also fascinated by writing fiction by hand and adds that this emboldens her to write spontaneously and unconsciously so that she could avoid her thinking part and bring to light all her good ideas of writing (Egan in an Interview with Killian Fox). In this interview, Egan confirms that she "truly broke away from convention (Egan in an Interview with Killian Fox).



No wonder, then, that Egan is not only against the standard literary genres and convention, but she is also eager to see life change for the better. Donna Seaman observes that Egan is "interested in the shift from the industrial age to the information age, and in the way resistance to social mores and the manufactured world can engender rage and even violence . . . (Egan in An Interview with Seaman)."

Jennifer Egan says that she firmly believes in resisting standard literary genres, particularly the chronological order of events in a work of fiction. Egan, in her interview with Heidi Julavits, mentions some of the factors that strongly have had their impact on her craftsmanship during writing *Goon Squad*.

One thing that facilitates that kind of time travel is music, which is why I think music ended up being such an important part of the book. Also, I was reading Proust. He tries, very successfully in some ways, to capture the sense of time passing, the quality of consciousness, and the ways to get around linearity, which is the weird scourge of writing prose (Egan in an Interview with Julavits).

Being unsatisfied with the chronological order events in a work of fiction, Egan considers the straitjacket of a formal work to be some shackles which she is eager to shun. Referring to the fact that she never wants to adhere to the traditional rules or chronological order of events, she observes, "It allowed me to do, in the boldest way, the thing I was trying to do already: to write incorporating gaps and interruptions, to try to elude the straitjacket of chronology that writers always struggle with (Egan in an Interview with Alec Michod). When Egan says that she intends to have 'gaps and interruptions' in her fiction, she hints at her eagerness to write a narrative without a chronological order.

Alec Michod mentions Egan's view regarding *Goon Squad* as an unconventional novel. Egan admits that her novel does not



abide by the formal rules of writing fiction when she says: "I knew pretty early that it wasn't a conventional novel, or a story collection—it didn't fit into the standard literary genres that were available to me, so I thought, well, it's a record album (Egan in an Interview with Alec Michod)." Since *Goon Squad* is an array of chapters, there is no sole protagonist for the whole novel. Unlike traditional authors, Egan does not believe in having a certain protagonist at the kernel of her work. Monika Fludernik in her book *An Introduction to Narratology* asserts that "One criterion of what makes a narrative a narrative is the requirement of having a human or human-like (anthropomorphic) protagonist at the centre (Fludernik 6)." In her interview with Richard Abowitz, Egan, however, comments on the methodology she has had in mind during writing her novel.

But I had three rules in mind as I worked on this. Each chapter would be about a different person. I did not want to return to the same protagonist again. Two: that each chapter would have a different mood, tone and vibe. Three: that each would be able to stand completely on its own (Egan in an Interview with Abowitz 7).

In this regard, Jennifer Egan from the very inception of writing her fiction intends to have no single protagonist, which ultimately leads to the fact that her novel's time frame should be nonlinear. In his book *Narrative Fiction:*

Contemporary Poetics, Shlomith, referring to the succession of events in a fiction work, stresses this point when he says: "[S]trict succession can only be found in stories with a single line or even with a single character. The minute there is more than one character, . . . the story is often multilinear rather than unilinear (Shlomith 18). In a simple and easy way, Shlomith expounds the difference between the linear and non-linear fiction when he explicates: "If events a, b, c figure in the text in the order b, c, a then 'a' is analeptic. If on the other hand, they



appear in the order c, a, b then 'c' would be proleptic (Shlomith 48)."

To discuss time frame in fiction, one has to bear in mind the fact that there is a difference in time between the time viewed by the readers and the actual time duration of the events in fiction. Fludernik points out that "Story time is very often discussed under the heading of *tempo* or *pace*. Basically, what is at issue here is how reading or viewing time compares with the actual duration of the events described (Fludernik 32)."

Time, in Jennifer Egan's novel *Goon Squad*, is manipulated in that the author very well knows the extent to which both time and characters are intricately intertwined. It is a sort of relentless struggle that never comes to an end. Where time is personified, fiction works overtly explicate the never-ending conflict between the two—time and characters. Silber expounds this when she says: "This can be seen more clearly as we turn to stories that do this quite directly, stories whose characters announce themselves as engaged in a particular struggle with time (Joan Silber 83)."

In *Goon Squad*, we will concentrate on two main terms: analepsis and prolepsis. These two terms branch from anachrony. The author of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* gives us the definition of the three terms: anachrony, analepsis and prolepsis. The author argues that the order of the events in the story might be quite different from the order of the events in the plot. Such a discrepancy is called anachrony, which takes two main forms: flashback or analepsis and flashforward or prolepsis (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 9).

Monika Fludernik deftly defines the three chronological terms when she asserts that anachrony "refers to breaks in the chronology of a story. The narrative discourse then turns back to



events which happened previously (analepsis) or jumps forward to discuss what will happen later (prolepsis) (Fludernik 44.)"

Fludernik also adds that narratologists have been much obsessed with the chronological order of events in a work of fiction and how such an order can be dispensed with when the author adopts the technique of analepsis and prolepsis. In this regard, Fludernik observes:

Drawing on the work of Genette, narratologists have paid particular attention to anachrony, in other words to deviations from chronological order. The most common of these is the flashback, also called analepsis, in which prior happenings are recounted, often as part of something the hero/heroine remembers; sometimes the purpose is to explain unexpected events which have just been related (Fludernik 34).

Anachronies in a work of fiction make it uneasy for readers to follow up the series of events as Fludernik points out when she refers to works such as Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Fludernik remarks: "In these texts, it is impossible to work out a storyline (fabula) since we know too little about what happens, or, in the case of Márquez, we have conflicting accounts of events (Fludernik 105)." However, it is worth mentioning that anachronies help the author to turn his fabula into *sjuzhet* since fabula means narrating the events in a series while *sjuzhet* refers to the events after being reshaped by the hand of the author. This is what N. J. Lowe states out in his book *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* to show the difference between the two terms:

Fabula (in English, usually 'story') is the series of events the work recounts, but imagined stripped of all the artifices of storytelling: a series of actual events in their natural order, in what merely happens to be a fictional world. In contrast, *sjuzhet* is the account of those same



events that we actually get, reordered and reshaped in the process of telling to reach and affect the audience or reader in a particular and deliberate way (Lowe 5).

Hence, using anachrony as part of narratology in writing fiction helps the author let his/her characters roam in time by going backward and forward. Mark Currie in his book *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* stresses this point when he says that "One of the striking abilities of the fictional narrative, as Genette has analysed, is its freedom to roam in time, and particularly in the use of the anachronies of analepsis and prolepsis (Currie 21)."

Jennifer Egan in her novel manipulates time "telling the tale as a sequence of anachronic stories (Buzard 1)." By using 'anachronic stories', Egan, as Buzard puts it, lets the events in her novel move around "between the present day, the 1970s, the near future, and everywhere in between, but the sudden changes in time aren't just random; Egan chooses when and how to move the characters through time very deliberately (Buzard 2)."

To show that the events in *Goon Squad* anachronically span over approximately 50 years is quite apparent. Chronologically, the events in Chapter Four entitled 'Safari', for instance, are the first events to take place in the novel. This chapter focuses on the main character in this chapter, named Lou Kline who is on a ten-day safari to Africa, accompanied with his 14-year-old daughter, Charlie, and 11-year-old son Rolph. On this trip, Lou is followed by his girl-friend Mindy, who is on her Ph.D. anthropology program at Berkeley and only 23 years of age (Chapter 4). While Lou Kline, in his late thirties, makes love with his girl-friend, his daughter always reminds him that he is married to her mother and he answers her "I'm aware of that (Ch. 4)." From among the Samburu warriors in Kenya, Charlie exchanges glances with the most beautiful warrior, only five years her senior. Ch. 4. As Jennifer Egan mentions in this chapter, the events take place in 1973 when she proleptically



refers to the 'most beautiful warrior' and speaks about what will happen to him in the future. Egan says:

Thirty-five years from now, in 2008, this warrior will be caught in the tribal violence between the Kikuyu and the Luo and will die in a fire. He'll have had four wives and sixty-three grandchildren by then, one of whom, a boy named Joe, will inherit his lalema: the iron hunting dagger in a leather scabbard now hanging at his side. Joe will go to college at Columbia and study engineering, becoming an expert in visual robotic technology that detects the slightest hint of irregular movement (the legacy of a childhood spent scanning the grass for lions). He'll marry an American named Lulu and remain in New York, where he'll invent a scanning device that becomes standard issue for crowd security (Ch. 4).

Later, Lulu appears with her mother Dolly in Chapter Eight entitled 'Selling the General' the events of which take place in 2008. Egan tells us that Lulu's father is unknown while the child now at the middle of her age believes that her father has passed away. We know that Lulu in Chapter Eight is only nine years of age and has heard nothing from her mother about the identity of her father. "Dolly felt the warmth of her daughter's body, this child of her middle age, of an accidental pregnancy resulting from a fling with a movie-star client. Lulu believed her father was dead; Dolly had shown her pictures of an old boyfriend (Ch. 8)."

In Chapter 13, Lulu reappears to be a graduate and becomes Bennie Salazar's assistant.

Lulu was in her early twenties, a graduate student at Barnard *and* Bennie's full-time assistant: a living embodiment of the new "handset employee": paperless, deskless, commuteless, and theoretically omnipresent, though Lulu appeared to be ignoring a constant chatter of



handset beeps and burps. The photos on her page had not done justice to the arresting, wide-eyed symmetry of her face, the radiant shine of her hair. She was "clean": no piercings, tattoos, or scarifications. All the kids were now(Ch. 13).

Anachronically, Lulu's timeline in the novel is violated more than once through the use of prolepsis (flash-forward). As mentioned before, the first time Lulu's name is referred to occurs in Chapter Four when we are informed by the author that Joe, one of the grandchildren of 'the most beautiful warrior' in Kenya will marry an American lady, called Lulu. Lulu's first appearance in the novel happens in Chapter Eight when Lulu is only nine years old, an elementary school student. Later in Chapter Thirteen, she reappears when she is 23 as a graduate and works as Bennie Salazar's full-time assistant. In such a case, Egan the author manipulates prolepsis to mainly rest on breaking up the timeline of many characters in her fiction. This technique gives the author the opportunity to project the characteristics of as many characters as she wants. In the meantime, the author in an attempt to show the relationship between characters and time has to make use of anachronism. Elizabeth Buzard asserts that Egan brings to light the fact that she has been more fascinated with characterization than with plot.

By telling the stories this way, what happens becomes less important than to whom it happens; characters are emphasized over plot. By focusing on these characters and how they deal with time's relentless passing rather than dwelling on the specifics of what exactly the characters face in the long run, Egan brings out the theme that everyone, no matter their circumstances, must come to terms with time (Buzard 2).

Had Egan been obsessed with plot more than with characterization, the use of anachronism would have been more than impossible. Quite the contrary, Egan has been preoccupied



with focusing on characters and time structure in her fiction. To show to what extent Egan the novelist disregards timeline in her fiction, we can elaborate on some more examples from the novel *Goon Squad*.

First, the events in Chapter One are narrated in the form of analepsis. The whole chapter is narrated analeptically in that it is mainly based on Sasha's narration of her problem with kleptomania when she speaks to Coz, her therapist. Being a kleptomaniac and only 21 years of age at that time, she has been a kleptomaniac and freshman "She was almost twenty-one. Her stepfather had pulled every string to get her in here(Ch. 10)". In this chapter, Sasha now 35 recounts the events when she was 21. Ted Hollander, her uncle, and Hammer, her stepfather, do their utmost to bring Sasha back to the States because she has run away to Naples. All that happened to her in the company of Alex is nothing but analepsis.

Second, the events in Chapter Three, entitled "Ask Me If I Care" are narrated in the 70s in the last century when Bennie, Rhea, Jocelyn, Alice, Scotty, Joel, and Marty form a punk rock band called 'The Flaming Dildos' which also has many other names as Rhea, the narrator, says: "The Flaming Dildos have had a lot of names: the Crabs, the Croks, the Crimps, the Crunch, the Scrunch, the Gawks, the Gobs, the Flaming Spiders, the Black Widows (Ch. 3)." The chapter also spans to embrace the beginning of the 80s as Rhea grudgingly comments on the hippies at that epoch:

Nineteen eighty is almost here, thank God. The hippies are getting old, they blew their brains on acid and now they're begging on street corners all over San Francisco. Their hair is tangled and their bare feet are thick and gray as shoes. We're sick of them (Ch. 3).

The Dildos do not perform their job well since everything around them is at a mess as Rhea narrates: "The Dildos start



playing "What the Fuck?" but now garbage is spewing at the stage, chucked by four guys with safety-pin chains connecting their nostrils to their earlobes. Every few seconds another drink strikes Scotty's face (Ch. 3).

Second, the events in Chapter Two, on the other hand, show that Bennie Salazar is a man in his early forties, divorced from his first wife, called Stephanie, has a 9-year-old child, and drinks coffee with gold flakes, an attempt to restore erectile function he has recently lost. To show how Egan disregards the timeline in her fiction, the events in Chapter Two occur in early 21st century while the events in Chapter Three take place in 1980s and this is what we call analepsis since Chapter Two shows Bennie a man with a kid while Chapter Three shows him just a teenager among his band friends Rhea, Jocelyn, Alice, Scotty, Joel, Marty, and Lou, who form the punk rock band or 'The Flaming Dildos'.

Third, the use of analepsis can be conspicuously displayed through the character of Sasha Grady. The first time Sasha appears occurs in Chapter One (Found Objects) when Sasha is 35 years of age and no longer works as an assistant to Bennie Salazar who fires her for her kleptomania. Relying on the use of analepsis, Egan shows us Sasha in Chapter 10, as a freshman in NYU and "she's taking six courses a semester plus summer school so she can graduate in three years. She's a business/arts double major, like you, but in music (Ch. 10)." In this concern, Egan, by manipulating analepsis and prolepsis, lets her characters roam in time. Worthy of noting is that fiction writers resort to analepsis more than prolepsis. Shlomith, regarding this point, observes: "Prolepses are much less frequent than analepses, at least in the western tradition (Shlomith 50).

Analepsis is also manipulated in Chapter 11 when Sasha who is at the age of 19 runs away to Naples and Ted Hollander her uncle "agreed to travel to Naples in search of his missing



niece, he drew up for his brother-in-law, who was footing the bill, a plan for finding her . . . (Ch. 11)."

Fourth, Egan in Chapter 12 presents the readers with one of the best examples of the use of prolepsis in *Goon Squad*. Worth mentioning is that this chapter is written in the form of PowerPoint Presentation to show to what extent Egan is fascinated by modern technology and how Egan is against formality in writing her fiction. Egan tells us that Sasha in this chapter, entitled 'Great Rock and Roll Pauses', is in her mid-thirties and she lives with her two kids and their father Drew Blake in the California desert in 202- (Ch. 12). In this regard, Egan mentions only three numbers from the left and she leaves the fourth number to be surmised by the readers. The year might be 2020 or 2029 or the like. This is what we call prolepsis when some events are imagined to happen in the future.

Proleptically, Chapter 13, which is entitled 'Pure Language', is about what may happen in the future. Egan imagines how English language would become when it is used by young generations. Such generations are expected to write English this way: "if thr r childrn, thr mst b a fUtr, rt?, ... pls wAt 4 me, my bÜtiful wyf, . . . th stRs u cant c, . . . (Ch. 13)." Moreover, Egan's craftsmanship in showing prolepsis is displayed in bringing to light the conflict between generations on two levels: the language level and the technological one. The conflict between generations in language is revealed in the way younger generations write language on the one hand and the formal language we still have, on the other. The conflict on the technological level is unearthed through the ubiquitous use of handsets among toddlers. In this last chapter, Alex, who dates Sasha in Chapter One, is married to a woman named Rebecca and has a daughter called Cara-Ann. Now, Cara-Ann, who is still a toddler, longs for having Starfish (a kiddy handset) while her parents resist the idea and they agree that she should not touch Starfish until she is five. They also agree to sparingly use their handsets in front of her (Chapter 13). It becomes quite apparent



that Egan in a proleptic way warns us as readers that toddlers will be mad about owning Starfish and how Starfish may have horrific impacts on young kids. Egan argues that these kiddie handsets will be owned by all kids. In Egan's words, "Starfish, or kiddie handsets, were ubiquitous, any child who could point was able to download music – the youngest buyer on record being a three- month- old in Atlanta, . . . (Ch. 13)

Fifth, the use of analepsis is brought to light through Egan's manipulation of the character of Bennie Salazar. In Chapter Two, Bennie is quite worried about many issues in his life as he plainly puts it: "He wasn't sure quite when or quite why this had happened: The divorce from Stephanie? The battle over Christopher? Having recently turned forty-four? (Ch. 2)." At that time, Bennie is just 44 years of age and his son Chris (from Stephanie his first wife) is only 9. On the other hand, Bennie, in Chapter 7, is only 40 and his son is 5 years of age. Stephanie at that time is used to "dropping off Chris for kindergarten . . . (Ch. 7)." Analeptically, the events in Chapter Seven four years precede those in Chapter Two.

The sixth and last example to be supplied here touches upon the character of Alex who strikingly shows anachronism, which is revealed in the form of ellipsis. Alex, in this regard, appears only two times in *Goon Squad*: he shows up in the first chapter and then in the last one. In the first, he is Sasha's 'lame date', and his date has been a lame one since "he'd been on the verge of aborting their date (Ch. 1)." Sasha in Chapter One seems to be tremendously infatuated with Alex's admirable shape. Sasha is "trying to remember Alex's age on his profile. Twenty-eight, she thought, but he seemed younger than that, may be a lot younger (Ch. 1)." Sasha very well knows that Alex is "in excellent shape, not from going to the gym but from being young (Ch. 1)." By the end of Chapter One, Sasha has sex with Alex and "After the bath he put on his pants and left. I haven't talked to him since (Ch. 1)." In Chapter 13, Alex seems to remember nothing of Sasha's 'lame date', which involves "winter,



darkness, and something about a wallet, of all things, but had it been lost? Found? Stolen? The girl's wallet, or his own? The answers were maddeningly absent (Ch. 13)." When Sasha's name abruptly comes to his mind, he seems to call up Sasha's image, which instantly reminds him of his youth and exuberant days. At this moment, Alex imagines himself "walking in to her apartment and finding himself still there—his young self, full of schemes and high standards, with nothing decided yet. . . . The whole crazy pantomime collapsed and blew away (Ch. 13)." By the end of his imagination, both Alex's story and *Goon Squad* come to an end. "Alex snapped open his eyes, and he and Bennie both turned—whirled, really, peering for Sasha in the ashy dark. But it was another girl, young and new to the city, fiddling with her keys (Ch. 13)". In her novel, Jennifer Egan uses anachronism, represented in analepsis and prolepsis, could bring events full circle in that the girl who is not Sasha could be anyone and henceforth life cycle starts again.

Joan Silber explicates why the use of anachronism though it complicates a work of fiction is so important when she expounds her view that "Switchback time, though it makes a story more complicated, is as elemental as the process of associative thought. It is most useful when an added line of event can really clarify and expand what a story is about (Joan Silber 53)."

What we can say about *Goon Squad* can be applicable to not if not all of Egan's oeuvre. This also implies the fact that each of Egan's novels can be dealt with from different critical views. Alec Michod asserts that her novels cannot be categorized as novels that belong to only one author.

Jennifer Egan is widely regarded, not pejoratively, as an "unclassifiable" novelist. Indeed, each of her books—*Emerald City*, *The Invisible Circus*, *Look at Me*, *The Keep*, and now *A Visit From the Goon Squad*—could have been



written by different writers, so distinct are they in setting and style (Egan in an Interview with Michod).

To conclude, Jennifer Egan through her masterpiece *Goon Squad* shows the extent to which she is not a traditional novelist. Like great other novelists such as Lawrence Sterne, George Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, she does not care about formal rules in writing her fiction. Hence, her works of fiction seem to belong to no literary movement since she mainly relies on non-linearity and experimentation. The framework Egan had in mind before shaped her fiction. As she mentions three rules adopted in writing *Goon Squad* two of which are that no protagonist is to be repeated in more than one chapter and that each chapter should stand alone. As is the case, narratology, especially anachronism, is probably the best tool of criticism a researcher can use to deal with *Goon Squad* from the critical point of view. Egan, as shown above, relies heavily on the element of time in writing her fiction and lets her characters roam in time using leaps in time such as analepsis and prolepsis. However, her novel *Goon Squad*, as a multilayered novel, can be dealt with from different views such as postmodernism, psychoanalysis, linguistic features, music industry, and social media.



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