

## **A Visit from the Goon Squad: Psychoanalytic Theory and Emotions**

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Emotions are mysterious. There are many reasons for a human being to feel emotional; unfinished goals, loss of self respect, relationship failures, and loss of time. Many emotions are portrayed in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. From losing close friends, to not completing the goals, to unsuccessfully living the life that was imagined, emotions come in tandem with each event. It is part of the experience of being a human to ride the emotional roller coaster throughout life, as many characters such as Bennie, Jocelyn, and Sasha showcase, but it is not the end of the world. With failure comes growth. A person is able to learn from their mistakes and ultimately come to peace and learn a lesson from their failures. Therefore, in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, characters exemplify the Psychoanalytic theory's connection to emotional behavior and even though the characters may be emotional from failure, there is always the ability to grow from it.

Personal growth is important in a person's life. Tyson in, *Using Critical Theory*, explains that the personal growth that everyone experiences within their lifetime, plays an important role, and comes from the, "emotional up and downs" (81). Tyson also explains that, "we all encounter life-events, as we grow up, that shape our psychological development" (81). From this, we learn that Tyson helps lay out the psychoanalytic foundations in relation to a person's emotional development. All events in a person's life help shape who they are. In some cases, if a person learns from their failures and mistakes, they can grow into a better person overall. Tyson, backing up the previous statement of growth, says that, "While psychological problems are a

natural and unavoidable part of being human, it is important to try to identify and understand them, because according to psychoanalytic theory, that's how we begin to heal those problems" (81). By understanding problems and failures that occur in life, a person can heal and grow. It helps heal the grief that may be instilled from a tragic event, or by understanding a mistake, it may give a person the strength to move on as well.

Jocelyn, in Jennifer Egan's novel *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, is a character plagued with a troubled life. Jocelyn is presented in the novel as a troubled young teen who was rebellious and got herself tangled up with another character named Lou. She decides to have intimate relations with this man and also turn towards hard drugs that he provided as well. As Jocelyn grows up and starts to reflect on her life, she realizes that, "Even with a needle in her vein, she was half pretending. Not me. 'I got lost'" (Egan 88). She is again reunited with Lou and her friend Rhea. She knew that back in her troubled, emotional years, Rhea knew what her plans were and Jocelyn was holding on by the tip of a thread. She did not know where her life was heading and she was not taking a path that ended with a particular outcome. As she is reunited with her younger year friends, Jocelyn also knows that now she is on the right track towards recovery after she realized she was lost and needed to find her way after her, "desultory twenties" (Egan 86). In order to find her way, it involves a process. A process which includes coming to terms with her past, which Jocelyn does. Jocelyn explains that, "Every night, my mother ticks off another day I've been clean. It's more than a year, my longest yet. 'Jocelyn, you've got so much life in front of you,' she says. And when I believe her, for a minute, there's a lifting over my eyes. Like walking out of a dark room." (Egan 91). This process, which involves being off hard drugs, is a continual process that helps Jocelyn come to terms with her

extracurricular past and move towards a better future. Jocelyn opened up, as she was very secluded when she was younger, to her friends and emotionally, and allowed her friends back in and especially family. She now has her mother as a supporter and ally during her process of growth and during her time of emotionally healing from years of drug abuse and mind games. As Jocelyn heals from her emotional early years, now that she is in her mid forties and comes to certain terms with her lost years, her emotional trials and healing are small in comparison to other main characters.

Sasha is a major character in *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, who was lost for a majority of the novel. Sasha, a young woman who doesn't know wrong from right or up from down. Sasha went through an enormous amount of emotional events throughout her life that attributed to her development as an adult. Most of the events were hugely emotional and took a toll on Sasha, whether it was physical or mental. First, while Sasha was young, she ran away to Naples and worked as a stripper and a thief. While working as a thief, she sold many of her items to Lars. Unfortunately, "when everyone else was paid and gone, he had squatted beside her on the kitchen floor and unbuttoned his pants." (194 Egan). Not only did she assumedly get raped when she was younger, but she worked as a stripper while she lived in Naples as well. Rape and stripping is some of the worse afflictions that a woman could have done to her body. Not that she necessarily knew what was happening to her at that time, as a young adult, she does not need that burden to be put on her shoulders, especially having to resort to prostitution in order to survive. This emotional toll put on Sasha would be an ever lasting memory that would live with her forever. In order to come to peace with this part of her life, she needs to come to terms and grieve for herself and her actions. As Frick explains in *Freud on Death: Does the Work of Mourning*

*Entail the Breaking or Maintaining of Attachment?*, “Morning requires time.” (Frick 10). To be able to grow from some of these emotional trials that Sasha had to go through would require time. With as much as Sasha went through, there would be no way to come to terms and move forward with her life in such a little time. It is a process and she would eventually learn what that process is, but not before more ill events took place in her life.

Again, while Sasha was going through a hard time in her life, she was so young. Her father and mother fought constantly throughout her younger years, which could have easily damaged her mentally in terms of having well structured relationships with other people because she had to deal with her parents fighting. Not only did she have parents who fought, her father ended up leaving her at a younger age. Egan portrays an emotional event that surely impacted Sasha. Andy Grady, Sasha’s dad was, “a berserk financier with violet eyes who’d walk away from a bad business deal a year after his divorce from Beth and hadn’t been heard from again.” (Egan 213). In today’s society, the abandonment of a parent is considered enough to make a young adult very emotional. The stability of a regular household, to which the young adult is accustomed too, is now an unfamiliar territory to which they have to adjust too because they are, “growing up amid so much violence.” (Egan 218). This type of change is usually met with resistance or change in personality from the child, as we witness from Sasha throughout the remainder of her younger years. While in Naples, Sasha’s attitude toward home and her old life, such as the appearance of her Uncle, offset her and, “Sasha relented, averting her eyes as he studied her forearms in the cold, weird light. They were scarred and scuffed like furniture. ‘A lot are by accident,’ Sasha said. ‘My balance was really off.’” (Egan 225). At this point, Sasha cannot come to terms that she is emotionally unbalanced and needs help. Those, “scarred and

stuffed” arms are a sign that she took out her emotions on herself rather than come to terms with them. By coming to terms and seeing the positive in the bad situations, to which she was a part of, can help her move on and become the stable woman she was meant to be. She should not have to deal with the ridged emotions bestowed upon her with every bad event in her life, but she should have to deal with them in a healthy way so that she can move on positively. This will eventually help her lead a prospering life. In terms of a prospering life, “On another day more than twenty years after this one, after Sasha had gone to college and settles in New York; after she’d reconnected on Facebook with her college boyfriend and married late (when Beth had nearly given up hope) and had two children, one whom was slightly autistic; when she was like anyone, with a life that worried and electrified and overwhelmed her” (Egan 233). While in Naples, Sasha’s uncle came to find her and bring her home. While he found out what she did and did not judge her for it, but he instead gave her some advice that it would be hard. In the end it was not hard for Sasha because according to her, she was a survivor.

In order to grow from past events and from ones as emotionally that Sasha went through, there are many ways to go about the process. A possible process is talking about the events. Sasha’s daughter once asked her, “‘What struggles?’ ‘Nothing you need to think about,’ Mom said.” (259 Egan). Even though Sasha admits to the events that have happened in her life, some may be harder to talk about more than others or Sasha just expressed that, “I don’t trust my memories” (259 Egan) and therefore does not want to talk about it and it is understandable. Even though talking about such ill events allow for growth, time is still a factor in relevancy of coming to terms with such events. Another such way to come to terms and positively go forward from ill events in a person’s life could be a relationship factor. In terms of Sasha’s uncle coming to her

rescue, “it is often friends rather than kin who provide an individual with a sense of belonging to and sharing meaning” (643 Fowlkes). In the time where Sasha ran away, her uncle came and gave her a sense of belonging and gave her a meaning to live life. She went on to becoming a wife, a normal human being with normal emotions, and a fantastic mother of 2 children. Not only did her uncle rescue her from a terrible time in her life, but her friend, Rob, gave her a sense of belonging and a shared meaning as well. Unfortunately, with Robs death, “mourning requires time” (Frick 10) and it may take a while for someone to forgot those who were just among the living. Sasha even “keeps his picture in her wallet.” (273 Egan). This move helps keep the memory of her friend alive and it helps keep the reminder alive that he gave her a sense of belonging and was one of her best friends throughout her life. He was there for her and even though Sasha won’t talk about him, she has come to terms with his death and that nothing could have been done.

As mentioned throughout this paper, growth is a major possibility when presented with the bottom rung of life events. When a person is in the deep pit of emotions and such and it does not look bright, they have to realize that there is a way to learn and grow from the experience. Grief is a, “three-“stage” phenomenon: shock, suffering, and recovery.” (Dean 157). This term is widely applied throughout this story to where there are numerous events in some major characters lives to which a person can pick out a characters shock, suffering, and recovery. In terms of examples, Sasha is the character with the most obvious grief stages. Such ill emotions attributed to such ill events, which happen in a person’s lifetime, are no easy emotion to recover from, but it is possible. By doing so, it can allow a person to come to terms with their emotions

or opinion of such an event, move on with their life, positively help others, and overall, live a normal life, such as what Sasha ended up doing and what Jocelyn was in the process of. There is time to deal with such emotions during the events, but a person cannot hold onto the past because there are always positive lessons to be learned. Therefore, in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, characters exemplify the Psychoanalytic theory's connection to emotional behavior and even though the characters may be emotional from certain events in their lives, there is always the ability to grow from it and learn.

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