

“Jocelyn’s Journey from Nostalgia into the Progression of Time”

By: Veronica Powell Hughes

In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, a central theme that Jenifer Egan captures within her writings is that of time and the passage of time. This recapitulating theme is expressed through many of the characters during their struggle to progress their lives from the prime of their youth and into their latter adulthood. In contrary to the many characters struggle to progress, Egan balances the novel with characters who “bounce back” from their mishaps and still maintain a life of relative success. Jocelyn from the “You (Plural)” chapter is a character who we hope to see in the light of a recovering drug addict. Although her inter -conflict with nostalgia tries to hold her to her past, by the end of the chapter we gain a glimpse of hope for Jocelyn that her past will not become her future and she will be able to maintain a sense of recovery or redemption that helps her to come to peace with her past mistakes and helps her to progress into the future.

“You (Plural)” is a chapter in the story written from Jocelyn’s perspective. She, along with Rhea, is over Lou’s house as he is lying outside next to his pool in his hospital bed and is dying. She goes into deep thought about times when she, Rhea, Rolph and Lou were younger. She goes into what some of the activities that they used to partake into. She goes into past memories. However, she mostly thinks about their youth and how they have evolved from their youth as well as how they have stayed the same. From a medical perspective, this type of thinking could be considered as nostalgia. According to Merriam-Webster, nostalgia is the pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again. While Jocelyn idolizes the youth in general as well as through her past, she unconsciously ends up cursing the old. Ironically, it could be suggested that Egan uses

this to demonstrate a turning point in Jocelyn's life and proves to the reader that hope can be established for those who has not had the most glorious past

The journey of Jocelyn's redemption begins with Jocelyn and her relationship with Lou and travels through her relationship with Rolph, and ends with a personal reflection of herself in that moment in time with a hope given by her mother to propel her towards a successful future.

The relationship between Lou and Jocelyn within "You (Plural)" is the beginning of Jocelyn's journey toward redemption and restoration. It is where everything starts for us. In the novel, Jocelyn meets Lou while hitch-hiking on the side of the road. She then becomes his concubine and enjoys the fast paced life of parties, drugs and alcohol. During this time, Lou makes empty promises to Jocelyn which later ends up being the root of her bitterness and hatred when she gets older.

Likewise, Rhea gets into the party life with Jocelyn and Lou along with Rolph, his son and they together they spend their youth in the fast lane of time experiencing the drug and party scene. As time progresses Jocelyn's party experiences that are far and between become more frequent and she becomes a drug addict. This life style becomes a struggle to live and renders her from being able to obtain the American Dream of financial stability, the collegic dream and a family. She is in and out of her mother's house. She has been in and out of college for over thirty years trying to obtain one degree and she is without a spouse or children.

As time passes, we end up in "You (Plural)", where Jocelyn confronts her past with Lou which serves as a service of hope for the audience that a piece of Jocelyn's life will be restored to her. When Jocelyn meets Lou at his house on his death bed, Lou and Jocelyn's relationship is not the best. She says very little to him besides "Hi" and "What about Rolph?" When Lou is on

his death bed, she pushes him into the pool and says to him, “I should kill you... You deserve to die.” Afterwards, she reminisces on all the lies that he told her, “You’re the best thing that ever happened to me... We’ll see the whole goddamn world... How come I need you so much?” Finally, she stands next to him on his death bed and he bids his good-byes before she and Rhea takes their leave.

Through Lou and Jocelyn’s relationship, there are a series of emotions that Jocelyn expresses towards Lou. However, one emotion that Jocelyn expresses that accurately captures the idea of the passage of time is forgiveness. In the article, “Forgiveness: a Sampling of Research Results” forgiveness has been proven to “restore a victim’s sense of personal power and bring about reconciliation between the offended and offender.” Even though Jocelyn pushes Lou into the water and threatens to kill him, it could be suggested that Egan uses Jocelyn standing by the death bed of Lou as symbolism for Jocelyn making peace with Lou attempting to progress with her future.

In addition to Lou’s death, Jocelyn makes peace with the death of Rolph as well. Towards the end of “You (Plural)”, Jocelyn asks about Rolph and she is informed by Lou that he died twenty-eight years ago. Generally, Jocelyn had a good relationship with Rolph while they were younger and it feel apart when they got older. Jocelyn and Rolph were born in the same hospital on the exact same day. She used to imagine her and Rolph “tiny babies in different hospitals, crying at the same time”. Once, Jocelyn and Rolph stood side by side, naked in front of the mirror, to see if being born on the same day had left a clue on them. They shared their first kiss together and they also would spy on Lou when he would have parties for his bands. Although Rolph’s death was not widely spoken of, it could suggest another piece of Jocelyn’s

life could have been made peace with that would have enabled her to progress into the future from her past.

In “You (Plural)”, Jocelyn’s personal reflection of herself leaves the readers with hope for Jocelyn as a character who seems stuck in time to become a character who is able to make peace with her past and progress into the future. When Jocelyn enters into Lou’s house Jocelyn nostalgically reminisces over the past. She seems to have this mindset throughout the chapter. One of the greatest internal conflicts that Jocelyn has with herself is that she is getting older. However, she spends a lot of time projecting her mental complexities on Lou and Rhea.

With Rhea, Jocelyn capitalizes on the fact that Rhea is married and has three children. She does this in her thought process as well as when she speaks to Rhea. Jocelyn criticizes Rhea for having three children and a husband with her tone when she speaks about them but Egan uses her conversation about Rhea as an opportunity for the reader to understand that this is really a self evaluation of herself. One way that she does this is through paralleling Rhea’s older daughter with Jocelyn. She categorizes them both as daughters who are depended on their mothers. She makes Rhea’s daughter sixteen which is around the same age that Jocelyn started her life that she longed to relive. She has Lou to say that she’s cute which is similar to what he told Jocelyn when she was around that age. Also by making Rhea’s daughter sixteen, she places both of them on the same level because Rhea’s daughter will be going to college soon to begin her degree while Jocelyn is still trying to complete hers.

With Lou, Jocelyn spends a lot of the time talking about how old he is and who he is now in juxtaposition who he was. Jocelyn’s thoughts about Lou range from “ How did you get so old?... When did you stop the parties... Does your bones hurt? ... So this is it- what cost me. A

man who turned out to be old., a house that turned out to be empty. ...Who is this man dying in front of me?...” to “Now the old man is crying?...” She also capitalizes on the fact that Lou has had six children and three wives. Jocelyn sees Lou as a dying old man. She sees him as a man that is weak and feeble. She sees him as a man that is empty and lifeless. As she progresses into the past to search for the man that she once knew; a man who had the parties for the bands and group, the man who would call for her when she was with Rolph, the man who picked her up hitch-hiking and promised to show her the world and the macho man with the fancy house and the fame, she realizes that he is gone and all who is left is the mean and grouchy Lou. Egan parallels her perspective of Lou with Jocelyn through the fact that Jocelyn was once dating him, so if he is becoming in that way then what was she to make of herself.

Jocelyn’s personal reflection about aging could be seen through her perspective of Rolph as well. Egan uses her relationship with Rolph to reveal her true feelings about her youth and capitalize on her nostalgic way of thinking about herself and youth in general. She does this by telling about everything that they used to do together. When we analyze the text, we noticed that everything that was done between Rolph and Jocelyn were activities that glorifies the innocence of youth. One example of what she uses is the exploring of body parts. Another idea is the kissing. Finally, she uses the condition of their skin to describe their youth. On the contrary, Egan uses the concept of death and age to show the discontent that comes with age. She does this through two ways. One way is when Jocelyn states that Rolph does not speak to her anymore and another way is through Rolph’s death. When Rolph does not speak to Jocelyn anymore it is when they are older. This puts a negative connotation on being old which further supposes the premises of Egan’s argument of becoming old that she exhibits through Jocelyn. Egan’s uses the concept of death to signify the concept in a way that I would suggest is quite on common in most

literature analysis. She associates death with youth, because he died 28 years ago, which places a spin on the literature and her interpretation of time. Death is normally associated with being old as it is with Lou but by associated death with the Rolph as a young person, it seems as if she is bringing in an element of victory. For even though he did die, he died at a young age so he did not have to come to the “defeat” of being old.

Finally Jocelyn’s relationship with her mother gives the reader hope that she will turn her life around after her previous mishaps. Jocelyn’s mother provides inspirations of hope to Jocelyn’s life. She makes Jocelyn’s past seem as if it was not as bad as it seems through naming it her “Desultory twenties” which serves as fuel needed to progress in time. In the section passage, her mother makes the drinks and plays games with her daughter as another way of helping her to focus on more positive things than the negativity that her life has caused for her. In the end of that section, Jocelyn is comforted by her mother’s smile which gives her a sense with herself so that she could progress in times as opposed to being stuck in the present or the past. In this section, we can see Jocelyn’s mother serves Jocelyn as a sense of therapy for her perhaps for her drug addiction or for her past as a pick-up girl but whatever the reason, we see her mother as a symbolism for Jocelyn to progress and receive hope and a future. Egan uses Jocelyn’s mother as an outlet for being stuck in the middle of time or within the passage of time. She is the glimpse of hope that progresses the story into the future against past and the constant reminisces of the past.

Jocelyn’s reflections within the text serves Egan’s purpose of illustrating to her audience how living in the moment could sometimes cause us to get stuck in the moment, live in the past and afraid to live in the future. Jocelyn is in a place where she seems stuck in the moment. Her reality is that she is a recovery drug addict who lives with her mother and is trying to receive her

Bachelor's degree that she has been working on for years. But within the text, she spends most of her thought processing wondering the time has gone. ("I sit at the kitchen table shaking salt into the hairs on my arm, and feeling shoves up in me: It's finished. Everything went past, without me."), reliving many of her past memories or youth(Her and Rolph in the mirror, her mother testing her of the flashcards and playing games with her, her and Rolph spying on Lou's parties with the bands at his house, remembering the promises made towards her). She spends a lot of her time searching for the prime of her youth and wanting to relive the good memories of her youth. Even though Jocelyn shows timidity towards living and progressing within the future, she uses her past experiences and the encouragement from her mother to propel her into the future. One example of this is Jocelyn obtaining her bachelor's degree. Because Jocelyn has had so many "desultory twenties" she normally remains stagnant within her life but Jocelyn has learned from these desultory twenties and now in the story, she is at a place where she is taking the lessons that she has learned as a stepping stone for progression and along with the encouragement from her mother to inch her way forward and progress with her life.

Egan uses Jocelyn's relationships with the other characters in "You (plural)" along with her personal reflections about aging as stepping stones to progress with her life. Through her making people with two of her past lovers and going into a recovery rehab mode in her mother's house leads the reader to believe that there is hope for Jocelyn because she has confronted her past and decided to move on. This aspect of Jenifer Egan's novel is important to the rest of the novel because it counterbalances the nostalgia that is seen through many of the characters in the novel which further gives a whole perspective on people's relationship in time as opposed to a one sided view.

Citations

[Anderson, Norman. "Forgiveness: A Sampling of Research Results." Forgiveness- Definition and Overview \(2006\): 5-8. Print.](#)

Egan, Jennifer. A Visit from the Goon Squad. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. Print.

Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 12 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>>.

Word Count 2549