

A visit into the minds of the goon squad



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From The Goon Squad*, each chapter brings with it a different point of view that adds new dimensions that build upon the story arc. To emphasize characters' thoughts and feelings and to offer different perspectives of recurring characters, Jennifer Egan uses varying points of view in "Ask Me If I Care," "Safari," and "You (Plural)." Rhea's perspective in "Ask Me If I Care" provides the audience with a comprehensive view of her group while delivering the story in an adolescent manner. The narrators in "Safari" offers a look inside characters' minds and their futures. Finally, in "You (Plural)," Jocelyn explains from a first-person perspective how her relationship with Lou affected her.

Rhea's first-person perspective offers a holistic view of her group and a reflection of her own adolescent state. Rhea is the odd one out in the bunch. As she puts it, "Jocelyn knows I'm waiting for Bennie. But Bennie is waiting for Alice, who's waiting for Scotty, who's waiting for Jocelyn...Jocelyn loves Scotty back, but she isn't in love with him...No one is waiting for me. In this story, I'm the girl no one is waiting for" (Egan, 42). She is the lone ranger in this mix of lovebirds, and her status offers the reader a comprehensive view of the gang. If the story were told here from any other characters' points of view, the scope would be limited to just that person's romantic interests. Rhea is interested in everyone's love lives, as evidenced by how often she has Jocelyn redescribe her night of sexual debauchery (43). This focus on others' lives and sexual activities can be attributed to her adolescence. Throughout the story, her juvenility steers the direction of the narrative. Channeling a manner typical of a teenager, the mood of the story can best be described as present. There is no evident forethought involved in the

writing, as seen in the abrupt transitions, as when the narrator takes us from “1980 is almost here” directly to “We spend every free minute in the Pit” (40-41). However, this immediacy brings her audience right into the heart of the action. The narrator herself is close to the story; her descriptions are of raw emotion and initial thoughts, as if the audience receives the narrator’s thoughts as they occur to her. Another way the narrator displays her adolescence is by substituting “go” for “say”: “Jocelyn goes, ‘Watch, Rhea. They’ll be blond like her, the sisters.’ I go, ‘According to?’” (40). This is how most teenagers speak: in short, assertive expressions.

As the story progresses, Rhea begins the transition from adolescence to adulthood thanks to Lou, who acts as a catalyst in her personal change. Transitioning away from the previous chapter with its first-person point of view, “Safari” offers more insight into characters’ true thoughts, feelings, and futures with the omniscient third-person point of view. The chapter splits into three parts each focusing on a different character and his or her perceptions on the other characters. This makes for a revealing chapter, in which the reader sees each character in a new light in all three sections. For example, “Grass” focuses on Rolph and his father, while briefly describing Mindy as Lou’s next fling. However, “Hills” focuses on Mindy’s thoughts and feelings, and the audience receives a previously unseen perspective. Much of the passage is devoted to Mindy’s sudden attraction to Albert, a man who reveals a side of Mindy that the reader would never see if the focus stayed on Rolph and Lou. Egan also uses time telescoping to give the reader a sense of who each character really is and where they are headed. For example, an African warrior is briefly mentioned in “Grass,” but Egan’s use

of time telescoping adds depth to even unimportant characters: “ 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” (61). This description goes on and on, until it seems almost unnecessary, but the extreme detail and foresight helps to characterize these people and give them meaning.

Divided into three parts and focused on three different characters, the third person omniscient point of view in “ Safari” also delivers insight on different characters’ views on Lou, which culminates into an unprecedented characterization of Lou himself. In the preceding chapter, Lou is negatively portrayed as taking advantage of a young teenage girl for sexual favors. In “ Grass,” Rolph offers the audience the first view of Lou in a somewhat positive light- as a father. The narrator says that Rolph “ is the one person in the world that can soothe [Lou]” (63). The audience sees the loving relationship that the pair has and it paints Lou in a more humane, caring light. In “ Hills,” Mindy offers a slightly different, more superficial perspective: “ Structural Incompatibility: A powerful twice-divorced male will be unable to acknowledge, much less sanction, the ambitions of a much younger female mate. By definition, their relationship will be temporary” (65). Mindy bluntly states that her relationship with Lou isn’t based on true love, but is rather a fleeting relationship where one party gains sex and the other gains “ luxury, adventure, and a break from her roommates” (66). This helps characterize Lou further as a superficial player in constant need of sex. Finally, in “ Sand,” the focus is on Charlie who foreshadows the familial

devastation that will occur years down the road thanks to Lou. Though she is only a teen, Charlie can begin to notice the signs of a dying family. As she points out, Lou used to hug her all the time, “ but as she grows older it happens less” (75). The audience gets a glimpse at a separation beginning between Lou and Rolph after Lou says “ Women are cunts” (78). Rolph develops a seething “ rage at this man who casts everyone aside” (79), realizing how despicable his father is. Rolph is struggling with his father’s misogynistic mindset and feels an anger paralleled to Lou’s when he learns of Mindy’s attraction to Albert. It’s clear that Rolph is unhappy with the current state of his family and longs for what their family used to be, as evidenced by his use of the word “ remember” so many times. The reader is only introduced to a snippet of Lou’s interactions with Rolph, but it is clear that there will be trouble between the two in the future, as the narrator later describes. Lou’s lifestyle and mindsets, and their effects on his children, are detailed through Charlie’s point of view.

Two chapters after Egan delivers Rhea’s perspective, Jocelyn tells the story from her first-person perspective in “ You (Plural)” and describes what effects her relationship with Lou had on her. The first person point of view offers more personal insight into the narrator’s emotions. Jocelyn, now in her 40s, voices the deep regret she harbors about her relationship with Lou as a teen. She describes her life, how she’s living with her mother and recovering from addictions and trying to get a degree. When Jocelyn compares her own life to Rhea’s, who has it all under control, the reader is exposed to the resentment Jocelyn bears towards Lou, this “ selfish, devouring man” (89), whom she blames for her life’s misfortunes. Jocelyn’s realization of her past

mistakes with Lou and her raw lividity towards him are fiercely displayed through her voice, in lines such as “ I should kill you... you deserve to die” (90). The audience is exposed to the full emotion behind Jocelyn’s story, which couldn’t be delivered as effectively from any other character.

Jennifer Egan utilizes shifting points of view in “ Ask Me If I Care,” “ Safari,” and “ You (Plural)” to portray characters’ emotions and to deliver contrasting perspectives, detailing each figure in the book. Juggling first person and third person omniscient, the author’s carefully chosen narrators each offer their own insights that advance the story and give the characters depth.

Works Cited

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