



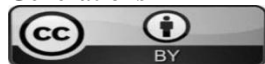
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Capitalist Dreams and Disillusionment Across Generations in Jennifer Egan's A Visit from the Goon Squad

A B S T R A C T

Drawing on frameworks of Marxian alienation, generational identity and capitalist realism, this research paper aims to critically study imbibition, success and alienation in Jennifer Egan's A Visit from the Goon Squad (2010). Through the use of Mark Fisher's theory of capitalist realism, this paper asserts that Egan's characters are formed by a capitalist system which imposes itself as the sole viable social and economic paradigm leading to ubiquitous disillusionment and the impossibility of imagining other alternatives.

Through Strauss and Howe's generational theory, the paper examines how capitalist values are experienced and interpreted differently by different generations in the novel, to show how previous generations' priorities have changed as younger characters switch from material success to the search for authenticity, arguably against older generations' aspirations. Egan's characters feel an extreme alienation, as their identity is tied to capitalist ambition, illustrated with Marxists theories of alienation, particularly as laid out by Karl Marx and Herbert Marcuse.

In addition, the fragmented narrative structure of the novel represents textual reading of the incoherence between personal aspirations and/or aspirations of the idealized society and the prevailing societal definition of success, Which reflects alienation in capitalist systems. This paper argues that A Visit from the Goon Squad acts as a critique of modern capitalist culture which reveals the existential cost of ambition in an economic system that does not meet deeper human needs, and contributes to a cycle of generational disillusion.

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الأحلام الرأسمالية وخيبة الأمل عبر الأجيال في رواية "زيارة من فرقة الشغب" لجينيفر إيغان

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وزارة التربية – مديرية تربية الانبار

الملخص

استنادًا إلى أطر الاغتراب الماركسية، الهوية الجيلية، والواقعية الرأسمالية، يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة نقدية بالطموح، النجاح، والاغتراب في رواية جنيفر إيغان زيارة من فرقة الشغب من خلال استخدام نظرية الواقعية الرأسمالية لمارك فيشر، يؤكد هذا البحث أن شخصيات إيغان تتشكل داخل نظام رأسمالي يفرض نفسه كالنموذج الاجتماعي والاقتصادي الوحيد القابل للتطبيق، مما يؤدي إلى خيبة أمل شاملة واستحالة تخيل بدائل أخرى.

من خلال نظرية الأجيال لستراوس وهوي، تفحص الورقة كيفية تفسير القيم الرأسمالية واختبارها بطرق مختلفة من قبل أجيال متعددة في الرواية، لإظهار كيف تغيرت أولويات الأجيال السابقة مع تحول الشخصيات الشابة من السعي وراء النجاح المادي إلى البحث عن الأصالة، في تناقض محتمل مع تطلعات الأجيال الأكبر سنًا. تشعر شخصيات إيغان باغتراب شديد، حيث ترتبط هويتهم بالطموح الرأسمالي، وهو ما يتم توضيحه عبر النظريات الماركسية عن الاغتراب، لا سيما كما وضعها كارل ماركس وهيربرت ماركوز.

بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يشكل السرد المجزأ في الرواية قراءة نصية للتناقض بين التطلعات الشخصية و/أو تطلعات المجتمع المثالي والتعريف السائد للنجاح في المجتمع، مما يجسد الاغتراب داخل الأنظمة الرأسمالية. يحاول هذا البحث بأن رواية زيارة من فرقة الغون تعمل كنوع من النقد للثقافة الرأسمالية الحديثة، حيث تكشف التكلفة الوجودية للطموح في نظام اقتصادي لا يلبي الاحتياجات الإنسانية الأعمق، ويساهم في سلسلة من خيبات الأمل بين الأجيال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرأسمالية، خيبة الأمل، الطموح، الاغتراب، الأجيال.

Introduction

One of the stiches that makes...is the dream of today's American society, the dream, the achievement, the richness of a life built on it. *The Great Gatsby* is an important story of the 1920s, the decade of industrial excess and indulgence, that the novel typifies the best American Dream that which was found by Jay Gatsby. Several critics have also often regarded Gatsby's own story as the telling of this wider literature Let down of the American capitalist dreams "a telling of this wider let down of the American capitalist dreams" (Cowley 45). Regardless of all the shiny covers, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is labeled very differently from *The Great Gatsby*, but the same sort of obsessions lives in it: about success and the American dream, and the endless pursuit of being a consumer. For this reason, the novel's conclusion proves that the effects of capitalism are not only external. While not composing an empirical study, Egan's novel does function as social critique in presenting the motivation and circumstances of each of the generations "and in narrating the lives and deaths of major characters La Doll and Sasha" (Mandel 63). The critics suggest to readers to look at the novel as each character in it would have been in their historical and social context, and better still

The great and rather naive American hope the history of a man, La Doll, who became a millionaire and ended his life being disappointed is irony that is reflected in the name of the novel “a comment on the American Dream that is ironic in itself.” (Egan 72). While La Doll remains the first capitalist who succeeded, he is not a hero of the later generations depicted in the novel. Characters like Sasha and Rhea, are not totally caught up in the idea of becoming rich and successful the way most of the narrative would have them be, but are not entirely disenchanted with the idea either would call it, the new ‘healthy ambivalence’ to being rich and successful, knowing the comfort a life of wealth offers them while realizing it does nothing to cure them of their existential malaise. Through the firsthand experience of Rhea, a smart and determined woman with capitalist goals this novel reveals how seeking money results in hollow material satisfaction so that it shows the ironic nature of capitalist goals on the contrary, within commodification, existential needs are not met, or that disillusionment is restrained “fails to answer to existential needs, or limit that disillusionment” (Marcuse 211).

The idea of pulling oneself up by one’s own bootstraps this illusion produces is best described by capitalism as depicted in Gatsby’s time and Egan’s novel “best described by capitalism as depicted in Gatsby’s Era and in Egan’s novel” (Marcuse 211). It might also lead to an alienation in modern society where humanity is reduced to mere dollars and human relations and happiness are a mere illusion in modern world economic prosperity “alienation within a globalized society in which personal well-being and authentic connection are sacrificed for financial gain” (Egan 88). This study, in which *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is addressed, seeks to determine how the modern novel uses ambition, achievement and alienation as devices for explicit defiance to the premises of neo-liberalism. Essentially, the arc of La Doll is customarily interested in the skeptical assumption of the existence of the American Dream, as well as of the beneficence of the capitalist dream ““Egan critiques alienation within a globalized society, where personal well-being and authentic connections are sacrificed for financial gain, reflecting skepticism toward the existence of the American Dream and the beneficence of the capitalist dream” (Egan 88).

Background and Context of the Novel

While many readers view *A Visit from the Goon Squad* as a novel about music, it is essential to recognize that Jennifer Egan’s kaleidoscopic, multi-narrative text is grounded in an ideological framework that spans literary and intellectual traditions. It reflects the teleological and evolutionary trajectory of the American novel over the past seventy years. Egan’s work is distinctly postmodern, as evidenced by its increasingly stratified depictions of cultural musicality during the rock and roll era. The novel explores how modes of connection were both expanded and constrained by the structures of contemporary capitalism, reflecting Fredric Jameson’s observation of “the ways in which the modes of connection were extended and limited by the possibilities of current capitalist forms” (139).

Egan explains how American capitalism takes social movements and reboots them into productized, capitalized self-interests as opposed to a collective process for progressing down a common set of principles and directions that “re-rolls social movements into individualized commodified investments that are fundamentally geared toward personal gains” (Marcuse 213).

This paper analyses how *A Visit from the Goon Squad* comments on how capitalism alters the connection between two people and how it hinders personal satisfaction paradigm. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a novel of music, of its obsessive perfection which began in the 1970s and 1977 (and beyond), of pop icons – sluts, drugs, gay pornography, rock n roll, children of strange Ishmaels, Susan Orlean, and all manner of love, or the apparent lack thereof. By exposing generational struggles of most characters, Egan demonstrates a belief in technological and cultural shifts as might be perceived as ruthless, mechanistic and damaging “a belief in technological and cultural shifts as might be viewed as cold, mechanical and malign” (Cowley 46).

The novel's music might be said to witness all the optimistic messages only the strong will survive”; “one must love ... or die” and despite the music’s strain and dissonance, its pessimism is fighting over its ugliness. In the face of economic degradation and postmodern anomie—the characters become more and more estranged from the world they inhabit. These waves of every sort and almost every hue of technology and culture take us further from where we thought we were heading, and the widened gap sets them even further afield from the rest of mankind ‘amidst such cheering of the triumphs of technology those of us who hate ghettos shouldn’t reserve our applause for the invisible ones: the process is ‘exacerbated they’re missing the real melodrama playing out behind the stars.

Literature Review

Characters related to capitalism are analyzed in many academic papers and studies. Most of the basic essays in this area depend on concepts of false consciousness, self-alienation, resentment as offered by such classical theorists as Karl Marx and H. Marcuse. These notions have developed; the critics of the twentieth century have come full circle back to the concepts of commodification, death drive and distraction as imperatives of capitalist society.

This scholarship is mostly concerned with questions of success or alienation in the widest possible sense of “capitalist form and the individualisation of the hero as obsessed or monomaniacal” (Jameson 147). Below are discussed specific works of literature engaging issues concerning an anti-capitalist critical tradition about pursuit and victory by capital. This tradition consists of such important stories in which characters exist solely for the purpose of the evil plan, which, in turn, is essential for the characters

In this literature review Marcuse explores whether capitalism is linked with imperialistic ambitions, celebrity worship, and the achievable dreams embodied by actors and musicians (as well as other celebrities) “In this literature, whether capitalist society is inherently linked to imperialistic goals, (Marcuse 221). For such works, scholars argue that the books are also escapist and the escapism is praised for the world creation, which does not allow any aggravations of present-day

As the critics pointed out, all the acknowledged exemplars of this sort of work are devoid of any social criticism, and they are not seen as “an allegory of corporate takeover”. But there are also critics who contend that, because of what they see as current capitalist presuppositions, social storied are not possible subjects for transformation. It would appear that capitalist society is disenchanted, desacralized, and politicized, toward the prevention of

experiences that would be disruptive with regard to the status quo. According to this framework the contemporary literature, published under the sign of neoliberal capitalisms, often reproduces these limitations, which points to its inability to overcome or even problematize the despair of the 'here and now' 'reflecting an inability to transcend or critique the pervasive disillusionment of the 'here and now' (Jameson 147). This literature review will then examine Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* as a superb counter to such a thesis to argue with respect to constraints that capitalist foundations place on human desire and the absence of unity people experience in a society.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of capitalist realism, there doesn't exist the potential for an open query into the thought of different types of economy, and since there are no other conceivable economies, there is an ideology almost impossible to contest that encompasses subjectivity in the present. But the ingrained Weltanschauung of post-war society, the way things are commonly accepted as being that they cannot be otherwise "a kind of resolutely incorporated belief system, which, however, is not a "belief" in any grand philosophical or ideological sense of the term, but rather a kind of 'triumphant grim realism' that goes with the contemporary world".

According to Fisher, ideology revealed as 'a prevailing melancholia' or a widespread disillusionment, pervasively As a music producer Bennie feels disappointed because capitalism hasn't brought him fulfilment. As his career fades Bennie deals with becoming less important in music production while observing the emptiness in both his work and private life. "He paused, engulfed by a wash of despair that had nothing to do with Sasha or the wallet, only him, his inability to feel joy" (Egan, p. 21). Of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Egan experiencing existential anxiety resultative from being imprisoned within the tenets of capitalism. This gives them no hope for change from the current state of affairs; in fact, this cultural disillusionment with the world is symptomatic of a broader acceptance of capitalist frameworks According to Fisher our capitalist mindset builds mental walls that stop people from envisioning any life beyond today's economic and social structures. This "prevention" isn't physical but rather psychological and ideological, stemming from deeply ingrained beliefs about the inevitability of capitalism. "prevents them from imagining any alternative to the status quo" (Fisher 2). Another theory that would be of good use for considering Egan's characters is the theory of generations.

According to generational theory of social science, it is expected that every generation will have different conception towards beliefs and world view as well as different focus in the time that they are in . Egan's novel clearly shows this because members of different generations battle each other to defeat one another in each tries to mould oneself to one's respective views of success, and meaning, and happiness of each generation. 'Older characters, generated by previous booms in the economy may yearn for success in the material sense only, while 'newer characters "Scotty Hausman and Dolly Peale are limited by the failure of that success under the austere principles of neo liberal capitalist economy' (Egan 57).

The base for what the character is going to be when they're an adult and success/failure is defined. This is not a person to person intergenerational conflict: it is a culturally rooted, economically driven conflict borne of neoliberal paradigms as propagated by capitalist realism "This is not a person to person intergenerational conflict: it is a culturally rooted, economically driven conflict" (Fisher 5). These forces have influence on characters, making their accomplishments in both career and education limited and teaching them to become didactic

That *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a novel that locates a different generation within capitalist realist paradigm as each generation forms its politics and economics from the realities they live through. With the help of the concepts of capitalist realism and generational theory, this consideration examines how the novel depicts a 'narrative-layered, schizophrenic generational text' regarding ideological outlooks as fragmented rather than as categories to be placed into either/or oppositions. The layered approach comprises exactly how characters are both created and constructed by neoliberal forces and set against lineage, thus providing valuable insights into more nuanced interpretations of ambition and success within neoliberalism in contemporary fiction.

The Illusion of the American Dream: Capitalism and Ambition in Modern Literature

Until the advent of capitalist economies described as built for scrutiny, people life of the ambitious in this society has been described by literature. Students read the works written in the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries, and are shown the differences of the society and the problems of these characters in order to attain the desire of social ascent. Whatever these works show, however, tends always to display a proper relationship of personal negotiation with capitalist values and their social consequences as well as mediation between the interaction of desire, ambition, reinforcement of certain forms of ideologies and social characteristic of idea of 'the structure of feeling' (Williams, "Structure of Feeling," 64). The characters' America is a search for one or another kind of improvement, the motifs of an individuality and fates (Jameson 119). Here the echoes of these themes are given a postmodern slant, as today's characters inherit the same ambition and literature is used as a type of thinking space wherein the dreams of these characters bring beauty, but illuminate division and splintering in the human condition they find themselves in now, as their ambitions represent those of their counterparts'.

For literary characters, the success they pursue often differs from the nature of capitalist desire, which is characterized by unpredictability, coercion, and devotion to an elusive ideal that is difficult to achieve. For instance, a character who wins a lottery and reinvests it in further gambling exemplifies how the pursuit of ambition and desire can lead to ruin. Another character's goal—a moral woman Sasha who manipulates femininity, honor, and power for personal gain—ultimately backfires, causing her to lose both wealth and love as she misuses these principles to "flaunt" her success, only to face the consequences (Egan, 87). These narratives of success emphasize the uncertainty of such achievements, often reflecting the transient and unstable nature of fortune in capitalist societies.

Nothing can be argued with on the parameter of demands; the cyclical forces of Capital are merely reinstated, desire here and the need to advance supplants. Another fable shows a man crushed by interest payments, waking up to the realities that the quest for monetary glamour and the assurance of the solidity of prosperity hinders the reality that this was to come with it.

Today's social standards put success as the top destination but on this path people end up feeling distant and dissatisfied. For some people success transforms into harmful negativity while emptying their lives of real meaning and safety. As Marcuse notes, "success never produces genuine satisfaction or personal peace" (238). Literary works raise the provocative question. Literature here functions as an analytical category, concerned with the ethic destiny of capitalist desire in so far as literature, as a category, serves to help us decipher it. In literature people show how capitalism influences a character's sense of self and personal connections depending on their outcomes in life's tests and business challenges. Through literature we see business-driven successful characters start living alone or acting unethically when money making becomes their main goal.

Generational Theory and Literature

On a very strong line of what has to be called temporal perspectivity, a reader is able to perceive the characters and the distinctions between the generations that the characters belong to and to see that each generation is defined by the way it relates to capital. These generational experiences are not permanently fixed; as those mentioned in this paper change over time, their impact on people's and their disappointment and psychical alienation due to the way in which they experience and understand capitalism varies over time as does the role that developing economic histories and structures play in these experiences. From this perspective, we see how the historical and economic signification of moments are witnessed in their own characters' goals, achievements and failures.

A Visit from the Goon Squad shows characters how generation shapes notions of career, achievement, and isolation and how such notions change within decades. Specific generational experience is used to locate each trait in Egan's novel, these specific generational experiences being associated with particular changes in culture and economic conditions. Bennie Salazar, for example, once an ex record company executive, loses faith in the capitalist system that once fired him up. These laudable efforts to regain youth and inject new life into his dwindling career point to his efforts to contend with the times and his disconnection from both his past and present "his struggle with changing times and his alienation from both his younger self and the present" (Egan 82). Bennie's attempts at updating his cognition circuits with meditation/ self-help, a kind of mirror of his ability to reject what is this fast changing capitalist milieu is captured by Bennie's attempts at updating his cognition circuits. For another generation it is Sasha tries to escape Bennie's technocapitalism and head back to the real, the more real, airdropping towards success and a closeness to time. Her relational model truncates Bennie's unattainable 'success dream' that drives the preceding generation taking a more concrete and realistic view of life "a generational shift away from the elusive success Bennie seeks" (Egan 94). The sociocultural element in Sasha's vision of connection and ambition differs from Bennie's; therefore, one may notice that, influenced by economic power, it is, in fact, the vision of her generation. On the other hand, Sasha's daughter is a member of a younger generation, which is totally a part

of the digital and the physical interface of their generation but still a part of the physical interface as the mother used to think about it. Here, Egan uses generational difference to show the progression of desire and desire disconnection out of otherwise disparate time settings.

Through generational theory, it becomes easier to comprehend why *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is more understandable through generational theory: “the conditions of a given time and economy shape how people view the world and their place in it” (Strauss and Howe 15). Every single character in the novel goes through disillusionment since successive generations try to adhere to what the capitalist notion offers them but only end up being isolated and with nothing to show for it “Every single character in the novel goes through disillusionment” (Jameson 153). By tracing people’s views through such dynamics, Egan shows us how the generations’ relations affect the processes of ambition, success and alienation in the modern world i.e. how generational perspectives shape how people respond to the pressures of ambition, success and alienation.

Success and Alienation in Contemporary Fiction

When examining contemporary literature on success and alienation, Effrem highlights a recurring theme: Young people chase perfect lives even as society creates more barriers between its members (Effrem, p. 42). The main character and key figures in this book show the general breakdown of society through their search for excellence.

However, as a rule, cotemporary authors rewrite the discourse of success in terms of passion, now transformed into solitude – a paradigm, by which the concept of success is defined within the context of the culture of commodities “a paradigm toward which the idea of success is increasingly refined within the context of commodity culture, where success is explicated through materialistic standards” (Jameson 150). This section discusses how the authors of contemporary literary works bring a novel strand of ‘materialist brand of ‘Success’ to the rhetorical foreground, suggesting that “ambition does not unify, does not empower, does not enable people; rather it makes them increasingly alone” (Jameson 150).

Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is occupied by characters of the paradox of success on one hand and of isolation on the other. How tough can it be if you’re a music producer, kleptomaniac and a man with a messy past? Bennie Salazar and Sasha definitely are. They are also alienated from themselves and the society as they ascend the professional ladder, this shows us that the tendency of the society to isolate successful people is correct "As they ascend the professional ladder, they are alienated from themselves as well as the society, which shows that the society’s tendency to isolate the successful people is correct." (Egan 76). Success is equally constructed as having positive tangible outcomes for the characters of the modern capitalist success that remains desirable but also undesirable. The paradox of success in contemporary fiction lies in its isolating effects: but the characters manage to achieve some pretty monumental goals, and not too closely related to the other characters. This solitude is presented as a 'fashionable exile' in works such as Ellen Egan’s, for example, there is a artificially constructed form of isolationism representative of a social condemnation of the artificiality of the modern existence (Cowley 58).

These narratives also establish the networks of capitalisms that they force people to slim down freedom a limited manner and go on to alienate through the propagation of dreams that are good for the market rather than the self. This explains how fiction nowadays fulfills the portrayal of the commodification of individuality, whence one discovers what contemporary fiction also shows regarding the pervasiveness of accomplishment, and the abundance of having in flow success having potentiality of having no success whatever at all. Even with this satirical dose we get a mirror image of the rather disquieting fact that in the society where entropy reigns supreme as a form of capitalism the only reward and more specifically the only reward of success is indeed nothing "In a capitalist framework defined by chaos and imbalance, success often proves to be an empty pursuit, offering little in terms of personal or societal fulfillment" (Marcuse, 246).

Sasha and Bennie, the main characters, do achieve something like career success, though they are mighty dissatisfied with their lives and express a larger discontent with the values of capitalistic society "suggests that this reflects a broader dissatisfaction with the principles and values inherent in capitalist culture". (Egan 76). Cynicism, which is the definition of postmodernism in literature, keeps the reader wondering if this is the capitalist victory to fulfill what man wants in relations and contentedness. Therefore, in a way, the last tableau of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a final accounting of the price of ascendant ambition in a world which suffers a high cost in exchange for meaningful isolation, in a larger sense, it is a novel of the century, a novel of assertions of literary value at the price of profoundly estranging the desiring subject from a Self and Other.

Capitalist Realism and Its Discontents

Capitalist realism as its leitmotif dismissing alternatives however sure, they may be *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan seems to posit Capital as they are that which defines and regulates for existence as the image of the twenty-first-century, both individually and collectively. According to Mark Fisher, capitalist realism means that this system remains the only rational choice within social and economic realities. Beside the objective side revealed by Egan about capitalist California, which shown the kind of personal desire, career-driven aspirations existent in the overemphasis of the capitalist, there is similarly the complete skepticism of that structure "reflected in an over parameterization of the capitalist system, there is also an extreme mistrust in that very capitalist system" (Egan 34). Egan suggests that ambition is a social condition of immigrant groups and not a quality of individual status.

This section aims to build on the portrait of capitalist dreams by exploring critiques of capitalist realism in relation to Egan's characters, who experience a distinct ambivalence toward capitalist ambition: If you desire authenticity and connection then you also desire the internalization of a paradigm of discontent "the internalization of a culture of dissatisfaction and perpetual discontent" (Jameson, 143). So the fact that Egan's characters are impelled and repelled by their personal and professional ambitions explains what spoiling is done on them. Desire results in frustration and labor, subsumed and controlled by capitalist realism which makes it nearly impossible to dream of something 'more or different' than what is already in place

In *A Visit from the Goon Squad* Egan's characters grapple with rock bottom reality of success that elusively pokes fun at their compulsion to be grander and grander. The desire to gather material possessions just to possess something noble seems righteous, yet once one has gained the wealth more often than not it's meaningless. In this respect, as Rubin, Bennie or Sasha are put into this societal whirl, they are told the existential realities of ambition in a world where everything has been commodified "Everything has a price. Every element of life has been turned into a product" (Egan, p. 89). By so doing, Egan captures contrasts such as between ambition and contentment. The contrasts mirror Fisher's assertion that through capitalist realism, people are disenfranchised from desiring anything outside the framework of capitalism; thus, people labour under 'prevailing melancholia' Fisher (16) describes capitalist realism as fostering a "prevailing melancholia," a widespread disillusionment that traps individuals in a state of resignation, unable to envision alternatives to the capitalist system. (Fisher 16).

The talent, fame and popularity which Egan's characters strive for are clearly fetishized but their efforts do not make them happy and they all end up feeling trapped "Their pursuit of success brings moments of exhilaration, but those moments often give way to disillusionment and a sense of being trapped within the very systems they sought to conquer" (Egan, p. 89). The structure of the novel also reflects historical capitalism's own patterns, and divulges how capitalist realism ensures postponed success in people's lives "capitalist realism sustains failure and postponed success in people's lives" (Jameson 151). According to Egan, in a dream there are no dreams of revolution, dreams of new social orders (Fisher 16) but only dreams of restraint and continuity.

The belief expressed in the statement—"in a dream there are no dreams of revolution, dreams of new social orders, but only dreams of restraint and continuity"—belongs to Mark Fisher, not Jennifer Egan. Fisher discusses this idea in *Capitalist Realism: Through his work Is There No Alternative?* Mark Fisher describes how modern society cannot imagine potential alternatives to capitalism both in reality and while dreaming.

The state of Egan's universe is despairing pessimism, the American Dream of fulfilment is generic and despairing, and heart-rending "capitalist dreams full of emptiness and heartbreak" (Jameson 151). Through writing *A Visit from the Goon Squad* Egan searches for the impact of commercial realism on the two generations, as well as feelings of disillusionment of those who sought success in a pointless system that only offers a brief benefit. According to Fisher, Jameson states that the capitalist society most of the time is betrayed by characters with boundaries of dreaming which are extremely lonely, without joy and capitalist realism erases the possibility of an alternative erases the possibility of an alternative, cover and closure.

Ambition in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Ambition is best understood in the context of individual versus collective puzzle: *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Ambition according to Jennifer Egan is not only ambition but also change that is social and economic in its networks of a capitalist world. The strive for ambition in this world is both uncomfortable but permanent connection with monetary gains

and job titles, and for attaining the latter is the key to peace within, “comfortably but inexorably tied to money and rank and for attaining the latter as a means to inner peace” (Egan 63). Yet there is also the problem of individual optimism as opposed to individual success—as how unlike are optimism and success, a rift that cannot be traversed. In her characters, Egan raises questions about the idea of success and the loneliness, disillusionment that come with it only to discover that success can work as true achievement if even dressed in the veil of success “It may not offer a way to live, but success, as Aird, the character, discovers it, can bring achievement” (Egan 63).

Hazarding one gets the impression that greed or ambition turns its characters into human windswept worlds: The characters have a 'double-edged sword' which motivates them but denies them the contentment. Story of Sasha shows us how he goes from being ambitious to being isolated from the rest. Still, haunted by her past Sasha feels “trapped on the dead-end street” and once again Egan depicts the psychological effect of striving for success in the context of capitalist America (Egan 63). Egan’s characters scrutinise and dissect all kinds of ambition, even all the way down to burnout, and they ride, too. As a result of the schism that occurs in the separation of the self into the hegemonic site and the narrative technologies of the novel, the relationship between ambition and the self is broken down into overt, separate stories, thereby enabling the novel of ambition as separate cases “the separation of the self into the hegemonic site and the narrative technologies of the novel.” (Egan 63). Typical of a novel set in the space of a neoliberalism are the affectless pursuits of fame and success by characters like Bennie the music producer/faker, or Sasha the kleptomaniac who loses her sense of self.

Jameson states that these characters are struggles of an alcoholic serving alcohol, an employee the employer and the employees vs their supervisors, and finally struggles for American dream, which measures worth by output and the victory represents struggles of people from different social rolls within guise of the capitalist struggles. Though her devices, elegantly formalized though they are, serve to decorate Egan’s redemption as such temporal possibility is inevitably contracted, that material limits of what can occur return when and where the ambitions of Eve and Ben are fulfilled behind their biographical screens.

The fractured narrative structure and shifting perspectives mirror the fragmentation of identity caused by ambition and disillusionment, underscoring what Egan calls “ground zero”: disillusionment:

By this representation, Egan brings to the foreground of the capitalist society the general idea of exclusion evidenced by generative mechanisms or structures which alienate people from their selves, and the world they create or forge. *In A Visit from the Goon Squad* ambition is not a road to success or high achievement but most definitely an essential part of the soul’s striving. Describing what becomes of ambition as leading to captivity and disappointment, or as enabling one to attain a goal and have the good life, Egan offers a shocking vision of how we live now “exploring what ambition leads to—whether isolation and discontent or fulfillment” (Egan 63). Her narrative on the complexities of the antipodal form of ambition in the world of the affluent reveals, with the characters’ transformations, that within the paradigm of neoliberal capital, success is likewise performative

Success and Failure in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

In this paper, I turn to the way that the perception of success or failure is represented, specifically in Egan's novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. The plots braid in and out of one another, but they never completely twist around every other because the characters themselves appear to be responding to a larger issue surrounding achievement within the world of capitalism. The novel correlates success and failure to subjective disillusionment and uncertainty about attaining the former "the novel portrays ambition and failure as disillusionment and/or skepticism on the part of the subject about achieving success" (Jameson 167). Egan argues though that although her characters lead different lives, pursue different quests of 'making it,' their different quests for success still illuminate the essential and culturally constructed nature of modern success (Egan 03). Success in Egan's obsession with status and isolation is linked to both themes. The characters cannot reach their success, yet such a capitalist dream is tightly rooted in her characters Riddley Walker and the society that values achievement but frustrates the female characters' emotional satisfaction "a society that values achievement but no female characters' emotional complacency." (Jameson 167).

The probability of transformed characters' scenarios signifies the oppressive character of achievement within the postmodern perspective of the modern and progressive society with the capitalistic motivation, which results in the attainment of the vapid goal "ambition often leads to emptiness" (Jameson 167). Egan shows this for instance with Sasha where realization of the nature of ambition offers both meaning and consequence reducing her life to paradox "Time's a goon, right? You gonna let that goon push you around?" (Egan, p. 127). There is one major theme that keeps cropping up throughout the narrative and this is about the conflicts people have with their workplace, the time they spend dealing with vices or pleasure in specific, the need to achieve advertisement in their jobs, advancement and the acclamation these jobs offer. These climactic moments often reveal an internal conflict: the discovery of the fact that happiness is an inner, personal process, rather than a career or status "Thus happiness is an inner, personal process rather than a career or status" (Marcuse 214). At first sight this may seem like a joy of character, but let's think of it as a wave of character redemption, washed with a last say release from desire to achieve something.

These moments underscore an ongoing quest for self-realization and individual emancipation while highlighting the tension between societal norms of "abundance" and the characters' deeper desires for authenticity. For characters like Bennie Salazar and Sasha, their labor to measure up to societal expectations results in isolation from their ambitions and estrangement from their sense of self. The sad truth of capitalist dreams, as Egan portrays, is that success is often paired with inner dissatisfaction "success is often paired with inner dissatisfaction" (Egan 103). Egan's characters experience journeys punctuated by disillusionment—the kind that comes with the bourgeois promise of fulfillment, even when capitalist success seemingly offers that fulfillment "disillusionment... comes with the bourgeois promise of fulfillment" (Jameson 167). Success and failure are here mutual interdependent that create characters to find themselves and make explicit empty commitments.

In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, the capitalist pursuit of success is sharply criticized as an engine that perpetually turns without ever stopping, leaving people searching for something greater than material gain “an engine that perpetually turns without ever stopping” (Egan 103). It is Egan’s ability to create the cynical and ambiguous present of American ambition from its success and its failure that accounts for her success. Her novel serves as a poignant probe into the elusive quality of fulfillment in a society dominated by rampant capitalist thought

Alienation and Disillusionment

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* gives us a return to alienation and disillusionment and weaves them through the personal narratives of her diverse cast. Under the perpetual stress of ambition, addiction, betrayal and the exploratory hours of a capitalist world, each person knows acute isolation, unable to form the wellsprings of deep connection he seek. There is narrative in which if a person is void of emotion he has to fill the void with concrete accomplishments and material success as if the measure of worth was only external accomplishments.

This world is here to tell you that one of the remaining few things you should be chasing in the world is to chase ambition, whether it’s superficial or fraudulent. This experience for Egan’s characters is of success at its peaks and despair at its devastating moments, leaving them farther and further isolated and disillusioned. The achievements which are pursued without any authentic self-reflection or the growth of relationships become a natural product of alienation. Most triumphs in getting to the top of the social or professional ladder are tainted with disgust or disenchantment. These moments force the characters to find a sense of meaning in things which are so career and money driven that they isolate one from another. The pursuit of this stands as a central disillusionment of their lives, fourth walls falling away, as they wrestle and fail to shake down all the skin of societal norms and yesterday's objects. The compound contains friends and family in Egan’s narrative, but one of whom is all about pleasure and instant gratification while so existential. It breeds dissatisfaction and intensifies their feeling of

When it does, there is a high cost: each of these characters escapes paying for their choices with each taking a long stride away from their own destination. In their research for alienation and disillusionment that show up hollowness in the capitalist ideals. Her characters’ lives embody a harsh truth: It’s in a society where ambition, and surface connections, are actually revered, where fulfillment is elusive. It leaves people to decipher what success actually must look like in a world that often can’t deliver on its promises. Such a broken system, the novel argues, is not conducive to ambition: it offers fleeting satisfaction as an aspiration, but full of promise for the crux of us questioning if true fulfillment ever occurs. As Egan looks at the difficulties of her characters she creates a sad image of a society that has alienation and disillusionment. In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, ambition and success aren’t rewarded with personal peace, but instead show their fruits to be forces that break apart relationships and only make deeper, more insidious dissatisfaction and life worse.

Isolation and Disconnection

All of the narrative's dual foci of ambition and success in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* are typed with counter themes of isolation and disconnection. Many of the characters in oeuvre are driven by ambition to achieve an external goal, and the pursuit it inspires often passes them by their friends and family.

When ambition is prioritized over authentic relationships we are tempted to create barriers between people, not live up to the promise of connection, says Jennifer Egan. As scholar Smaro Kamboureli notes, Egan's characters are "entwined in pursuits that, while socially sanctioned, drive them apart from one another, revealing the alienating effects of modern ambition". A good example of this disconnection is something like the generational conflict that two of the female characters - particularly Jocelyn - go through with one another. Jocelyn's detachment, however, is only on one part, her own, but embodies a larger societal dynamic. Her life as a product of a matriarchal expectations focuses on romantic dreams and personal ambition at the same time. His subconscious desire for independence is pitted against the idealization of love and dependence which gives us a profound disconnect. Jocelyn's internal conflict, both self-inflicted and societally imposed, is encapsulated in her reflection on the suffragette movement "The fight for freedom has only complicated things... what does it mean to be truly free?" (Egan 154).

Jocelyn ultimately records that the discord she finds between personal ambitions and prescribed roles, though has swept into the present, are rooted in earlier generations that were formed by the dissonance between one's self and society. As well, Bennie quickly adds to his story the alienating effects of ambition. There are patterns of dissociation both in his relationship with his wife and his business dealings throughout his career and love life. As Bennie's public image and success take precedence over personal authenticity he intensifies his troubles, which leave in turn his wife; Sasha, to leave the professional world and turn her energy towards her family. This withdrawal points out that you are alienated from the world governed by ambition and the compulsive need for external validation. One of Bennie's business associates, Kiernan is representative of a transient media that moves from place to place and competes in a crowded market.

Sasha's ironic and humorous attempts to salvage personal connection feel in total contrast to his increasingly desperate, awkward and impersonal modes of communication. Sasha's emails to Bennie, filled with "witty, ironic banter," underscore her effort to bridge the gap between disconnection and authenticity, even within the alienating digital space. Through these entwined stories Egan criticizes our modern capitalist model in which the importance of achievement and ambition crowds out the naturalness of real relationships. The characters of the novel are isolated, not only from others, but also from themselves, all the while ambition's becoming both a source of great isolation and of a driving force.

7. Conclusion

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* runs with broken spine, that is to say high fragmented: both stylistically and thematically Egan shows that people matter, generations matter, that there's no 'me' that is apart from anyone else's, no 'life' that is apart from anyone else's. This fragmented form underscores a central theme of the novel: the natural

process of the radicalization of the deepest personal ambitions, identities and disillusionments pinned under the thumb of the subliminal societal values. The capitalist critique at the heart of Egan's work is not at all complicated by each character's deep sense of being in a connected and heightened world that imparts heightened meaning to experience: a society open to promise, but no better than alienation. Egan's fragmented narrative, meanwhile, also capitalist individualism. Looking in on the middle class ideal of self-determination and personal ambition, something that for a long time has been held up as the road to success but, more often than not, leads to disenchantment, Egan takes stock.

Her characters may have felt they want to do many things, and despite achieving a little, the benefits aren't many. However her characters are often faced with existential dissatisfaction, and there's little in terms of freedom from expectations of society. Through this plurality of perspectives, Egan unpacks how, even the most zealous, have their worlds of success conflated with identity leaving them disillusioned and disenfranchised.

A look into how capitalism creates a pseudo formula where the experience and relationship of the human being is fruit of a distance between personal values and social demands. Where ambition and success tear a society apart, rather than cement it together, Egan multiplies voices and perspectives, layering them one over the other. Additionally, each character's journey, no matter how distinct between one another, converges to the same culminating existential ember of disillusionment. Through the various trajectories readers see the psychological cost of capitalist pursuits. Its final narrative does slow down, as the characters sort through their lives, which implies a lost hope in the collective. Though they may taste some success along these journeys, all of these characters experience a deagentialised, agonistic, melancholate agency of a certain sort, somewhat reminiscent of the despair of that class of bourgeois: one disillusioned with calls for neoliberal ideals. In this way, Egan's novel serves as a "seismograph" of modern capitalist life, capturing the impact of socio-political forces on individual identities and aspirations.

As Egan writes through fiction, she reflects society shifts and critiques through a fractured narrative that fractures while reflecting fractured realities under capitalism's promises and limits. Fictional seismograph, Her research implies that the slights and tremors of the landscape of our social system, as readers can observe the atavistic power of capitalist structures to do its work there upon the drive toward the individual's aspirations and towards the authentic.

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