



NARRATIVE IN THE NETWORKED AGE: POSTHUMAN MEMORY AND ALGORITHMIC HAUNTINGS IN JENNIFER EGAN'S *A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper Pulitzer Prize-winning book A Visit from the Goon Squad (2010) by Jennifer Egan is taken as a foundational work of new millennial narrative, contending that its broken, polyphonic structure captures the posthuman and digitally connected consciousness of the twenty-first century. This study goes beyond traditional elucidations of the novel and examines how Egan's inventive structure consisting of interconnected stories from different ages, genres, and mediums, and creates a "networked" narrative. The aim is to examine how individuals such as music executive Bennie Salazar and his assistant Sasha end up as archivists and victims of their own digital footprints, plagued by "algorithmic ghosts" of former identities, broken relationships, and cultural artifacts. Through the lens of digital hauntology and posthumanism, the study argues that Egan's work formally turns the novel into a platform in addition to representing new voices and ideas. To culminate, it offers a moving indictment of how human identity, perception, and cohesiveness in narration are reshaped—and frequently undermined—by the very technology that claim to preserve them. It turns into a literary server housing an ensemble of fractured subjectivities. Giving voice to the anxieties and adaptations of a consciousness, Egan's work thus stands as a transformative narrative for the new millennium.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Digital Narrative, Algorithmic Haunting, Networked Form, Memory Studies, Millennium, Narrative Innovation, Datafied Consciousness

A significant transformation by the beginning of the new millennium brought about of human prejudice, retention, and the fundamental fabrication of narrative, in addition to a change in time. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles foresaw that "the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born" (3). *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan

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stands out as a definitive account of this era, a work that structurally embodies a posthuman, networked worldview rather than merely including digital elements. The novel's polyphonic, dynamic, and multifaceted structure gives voice to a chorus of fractured subjectivities plagued by the "algorithmic ghosts" of their pasts, subsequently transforming it into a platform that both mirrors and critiques the data-driven consciousness of the twenty-first century. New literary forms are necessary to convey the complexity of this posthuman reality, which is closely linked to the technological revolution.

An encounter with the Goon Squad defies simple categorization. The book is divided into thirteen interconnected short stories that take place between the 1970s and the near-future 2020s. The stories center on Bennie Salazar, a former punk rocker who is now a record executive, and his secretary, Sasha. The book's first and most significant narrative innovation is this structural choice. The traditional sequential Bildungsroman is foregone in favor of a database style that resembles a literary hyperlink but does not have clickable links. Forms have affordances and limitations that influence political and social possibilities, according to critic Caroline Levine (6).

The novel of individual, continuous development—the traditional, linear Bildungsroman—is rejected by this purposeful fragmentation in favor of what can be called a "database narrative." According to Lev Manovich's theory in *The Language of New Media*, this structure reflects based on the principle that governs online environments, where content is not a set sequence but rather discrete, accessible units (218). While limiting the reader's access to any one, stable consciousness, Egan's chosen structure provides a broad, collective vision of an age. The characters are out of order, experiencing their highs and lows, youth and middle age, the scar preceding the wound, the result before the cause. This parallels the associative, non-chronological character of digital memory, where a search algorithm reveals different pieces of a past based on cryptic data patterns, and a social media "memory" notice from ten years ago might viscerally intrude upon the present.

Sasha's daughter Alison, 12, uses PowerPoint slides to tell the story of "Great Rock and Roll Pauses," which is the novel's most overt formal interaction with digitality. This chapter is an in-depth storytelling experiment rather than a practical joke. The slides' labeled boxes, arrows, charts, and "Notes" sections all work together to tell and design a story. Alison maps her family's emotional terrain using this business software, focusing on her father's preoccupation with pausing and her younger brother Lincoln's potential autism. Although the format limits emotional expression to be reduced to bullet points and graphical data, a deep depth of feeling may be seen in the white spaces between slides and in the creative visual arrangements. Hayles' idea of "intermediation," which is defined as a process "whereby a first-level emergence is captured in a new medium that again generates emergent complexities" (*Electronic Literature* 194), is literalized in this chapter. By demonstrating how human emotion is mediated through presentation software, Egan demonstrates how younger generations are naturally utilizing digital tools to build narratives and comprehend their surroundings, so establishing a new language for awareness itself.



This mind is profoundly tormented by digital influences. The characters in *Goon Squad* are tormented by what this article refers to as “algorithmic ghosts”—persistent, data-fied reminders of former personalities, choices, and relationships that reappear at random—rather than by specters in the Gothic tradition. While selling a soulless, digitally altered musical commodity in the present, Bennie is plagued by memories of his pure punk past. In an odd ritual, he adds gold flakes to his coffee in an attempt to restore a lost alchemical potency. His previous mentor, Lou, is a relic of hedonistic hedonism from the 1970s, his predatory past still evident in the ruined existences of the women he preyed on, such as Dolly and Jocelyn. Initially presented as a habitual robber in the first chapter, Sasha’s troubled childhood in Naples haunts her, revealing her past only later in the book. Her attempt to actualize the ephemeral and seize fleeting moments through the theft of a stranger’s wallet is a primitive analogue response to the digital age of unrestricted copying without loss.

The “goon squad” of the title, time itself, is the most poignant haunting. Instead of flowing smoothly, time is a glitchy, digital artifact made up of leaps, stops, and corrupted files. Through the shock of juxtaposition, characters experience time: rock musician Bosco, who is organizing a suicide tour named “Death-Vision,” wishes to record “the authentic last past of a moment” prior to it disappears (Egan 69). Bennie’s former bandmate Scotty Hausmann vanishes for decades until reappearing while fishing in the contaminated East River. His triumphant musical resurgence was later orchestrated not by genuine skill but by viral advertising to “parrots” (a replacement for carefully controlled internet audiences). According to Egan’s near-future chapter “Pure Language,” in an environment where “wordlessly, seamlessly, and in numbers too great to track, the parrots were flocking” to buy music that was marketed by hordes of “influencers” utilizing “viral agreeability” scripts (Egan 323, 337). Here, genuine connection is the ghost, and computational simulations of desire and camaraderie have taken its place.

The subject of memory, which the book depicts as fundamentally posthuman—outsourced, networked, and unstable—unites these hauntings. Cognition is no longer just a human intrinsic ability. It can be found in the “footprint” of emails and texts, in the electronic music files Bennie sells, and in the PowerPoint repository Alison makes. Data is what it is. Dolly’s daughter Lulu, who works for a celebrity PR who specializes in “attenuation” (erasing negative digital histories), has to deal with the actual practice of ghost-busting—trying to erase the algorithmic phantoms (drunken tweets, scandalous photos, incriminating videos) that plague her clients. Authenticity in the new millennium is an artistic endeavor, which is a major concern highlighted by this marketed memory management. The ego transforms into what Hayles refers to as an “amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (*How We Became Posthuman* 3). In order to prevent a rogue spectre from the past algorithmically surfacing to sabotage the present, one must continuously regulate their data-body. This implies that maintaining one’s digital footprint in the new technological age is a curated endeavor. As Hayles might characterize the posthuman subject, the self turns into a “pattern/randomness dialectic,” where coherence is a transient pattern endangered by the randomness of lost information or infectious guilt (*How We Became Posthuman* 286).

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In the end, Egan's book is a revolutionary literary work rather than only a reflection. Egan turns the book into a platform by organizing it as a web of stories. Similar to a cloud server or social media feed, the narrative "hosts" these various stories. As the reader progresses through the chapters, they take on the role of an algorithm or a user, drawing conclusions, establishing connections, and creating meaning from the many data points. As the digital novel has enabled to compile the backstory and have the records of these lives kept and retrieved, the final chapter's emotional impact—which takes place in a future in which Sasha's brother, a wounded soldier, gets a glimmer of hope during a concert—is enhanced. The book has completely changed; it now enacts the mental and emotional processes involved in traversing a multimedia, data-rich environment rather than just telling a story.

To culminate, Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a key work of new millennial fiction because of its innovative storytelling. Through its polyphonic voices, the scattered posthuman ego is given shape. It uses online mediation as a glitchy prism through which to view the past and the future. The book's transformation into a platform mimics the circumstances of contemporary consciousness. With its protagonists haunted by algorithmic ghosts of time, memory, and lost authenticity, Egan captures the fundamental apprehension of a future in which the body of experience is irrevocably tied to the prosthesis of technology. Rather than providing a nostalgic escape from this circumstance, the book shows that the new tales of the twenty-first century must, like Egan's brilliant and unsettling book, learn to converse in datagrams and find their melodies in the stillness between slides.

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