

Orpheus and Eurydice's Myth Revisited in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From The Goon Squad*

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Rilke's Orpheus sonnet 27 runs, "Does it truly exist: time the destroyer? / When topples the tower atop the peaceful height? / This heart belonging to the gods forever,/ When will the demi-urge send it with dire might?" And it is precisely on the destructing force of time that Jennifer Egan constructs her narrative upon. *A Visit From the Goon Squad* is exactly Orpheus and Eurydice's myth revisited, and she focuses on the tragedy of decline in 21st century America. A variety of characters unfulfilled lives conform the map of New York City, and Orpheus lyre has become a rock and roll group, The Conduits, as a sort of misconnecting force in the lives of them all. A careful literary distance gives an impressionistic vision of inevitability and opportunity lost. My approach focuses on the different interpretations of the classic myth, and on how Rilke's rhetorical questions offer an eclectic and metallic answer in Jennifer Egan's contemporary view.

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Introduction

Orpheus the man may have been a shaman coming from Thrace, and there is some written evidence of his father Oeagrus, but myth and reality appear typically mixed up in ancient Hellas, and the legend has perpetuated the idealized version of Orpheus the poet, the son to Apollo and a muse, a figure of extreme sensibility and unique musical gifts: "Like other legends it may have had a kernel of reality, but it was enriched with elements drawn from folk lore and developed by the play of the Greek imagination (Linforth, 1941, p. 294)." In fact many aspects of the myth may have been the work of creation of other poets, but it was customary among the Greeks to attribute their findings to legendary figures, and Orpheus, the nobility of its name, was handy: "In a perfectly natural way, therefore, Orpheus, the poet of the mysteries, came to be thought of as the first founder of the mysteries of *all* mysteries and a great benefactor of humanity (Linforth, 1941, p. 296)."

Images of the semi-god playing his zither or a seven chords lyre run as far back as the 14th century BC, but the written records come from 5th century BC. It is through them that we learned that on all occasions, rivers would detain their courses, while the rest of existence, rocks, animals and trees alike, were moved by his songs and rhymes. His exquisite music has perpetuated the idea of spirituality and purity that he represents, the quality of Art and the artistic as an everlasting presence beyond existence. Nonetheless the approach is somehow blurred by impossibility. Orpheus will not be able to rescue his wife Eurydice from Hades, like a vulnerable god he moans his dearest wife, but the focus is on endurance, and when a party of Thracian women

(or Bassarids) cut his head off, it continued to sing. The implications are that purity and truth have the quality of the fragile, and life is fatally doomed, but what matters is the effort of humanity to achieve love and beauty, despite the challenge of death. It is upon this dualism, a higher quality of life versus death that Egan's narrative moves about:

The other element that I was so happy to find in there, although I didn't "put it there" consciously, was the mythological aspect. The sense of this powerful creature who is not even fully human in the Mediterranean, that great locus of mythology, doing heroic things... was really fun to play with... What I wanted was that sense of reaching back to our very beginnings, the collective unconscious, call it what you will... not to mention the beginnings of storytelling as an oral tradition. (Dinnen, 2016, p. 1)

As in Rilke's Orpheus sonnet 27: "Does it truly exist: time the destroyer? / When topples the tower atop the peaceful height? / This heart belonging to the gods forever, / When will the demi-urge send it with dire might?", Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad* explores the effects of time passing in 21st century America in a variety of characters who lead their lives around the world of music. In due course Orpheus's lyre has become Sow's Ear Records, with Bennie Salazar, as President and record executive of the firm driving a yellow Porsche, and Lou, a glamorous record producer in a red Mercedes. As Williams suggests, Bennie and some other characters "show the path to wealth as a typical event for white, middle Americans... (Williams, 2013, p. 96)." All of this started in the eighties, when Bennie and Scotty Hausmann were playing as the Flaming Dildos, a punk band performing at Mabuhay Gardens in the East Coast, and Lou offered them a contract.

Eurydice in Hades

Like a vision of Hades, the context is hell, and has the flavour of the metallic in a carefully distanced view of reality at the turn of the century, very much in the way a short-story works. Actually some of the chapters had already been published by *The New Yorker*, *Harper's* or *Granta* in an elegant, subdued voice: "...a sense of an atmosphere, a location. I tend to have that before I have the people or even the language (Egan, 2015, p. 1)."

In the novel, the timing is loose as if made up of layers in a container, going backwards or forward in a non-linear sequence. The episodes are either around The Conduits, or the Stop/ Go band, or the Flaming Dildos. Life moves over the musical groups with a special concern on digitalization, the advertising industry, and the effects of them both, in the lives of people. The trademark of the age is hell itself, it is an époque of loneliness and misconnections, where silence has a meaningful sound, as when Rhea remarks: "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 (Egan, 2010, p. 49)."

The canvass of the setting is General B, "*a genocidal dictator* (Egan, 2010, p. 159)" who shares the publicity firm around La Doll with the executive producer of music. An effective campaign will try to erase his responsibility about the dead: "EXTENT OF B'S WAR CRIMES MAY BE EXAGGERATED, NEW EVIDENCE SHOWS... It was the hat. He looked sweet in the hat. How could a man in a fuzzy blue hat have used human bones to pave his roads (Egan, 2010, p. 161)?" In like manner Bennie Salazar is conscious of the transformations in the world of music, a true holocaust of the Arts. The world drown into digitalization, and the vitality of voices gone in the process:

He worked tirelessly, feverishly... to satisfy the multinational crude-oil extractors he'd sold his label to five years ago. But Bennie knew that what he was bringing into the world was shit. Too clear, too clean. The problem was precision,

perfection...the problem was *digitalization*, which sucked the life out of everything that got smeared through its microscopic mesh... Film, photography, music: dead. *An aesthetic holocaust!* Bennie knew better than to say this stuff aloud. (Egan, 2010, p. 26)

It is the time of Kitty Jackson, the actress, like an Eurydice in her particular Hades, she was almost raped in Central Park by journalist Jules Jones (Bennie's brother in law), who was conducting an interview about her life. La Doll will pay her money to appear as the general's fiancée in an effort to soften the hardness of his eyes. She is appalled about the dead: "Was I not supposed to bring up the genocide (Egan, 2010, p. 183)?" and then, "Do you drink their blood, or just use it to mop your floors (Egan, 2010, p. 184)?" but under pressure she will submit herself, and the general will pay her for a star role in the next film production.

Jules Jones is sent to prison for the intended rape, and when he finally comes out, he stays with his sister Stephanie, married to Bennie Salazar at the time. He is shocked at the thought of his own sister and husband's urge to be accepted at the very exclusive Crandale Country Club: "...And now my rock-and-roll sister and her husband are hanging around with *Republicans*. What the fuck (Egan, 2010, p. 141)!" The alienated environment may work as a toxic event, and he finds his own way by being a witness to Bosco's decay and Suicide tour. The parody is there. Bosco used to be the famous guitarist of *The Conduits*:

I'm old, I'm sad... But I don't want to fade away, I want to *flame* away I want my death to be an attraction, a spectacle, a mystery. A work of art... Reality TV, hell it doesn't get any realer than this. Suicide is a weapon; that we all know. But what about an art? (Egan, 2010, p. 148)

Participating of the general horror, there is also the figure of Robert Freeman Jr., Sasha's roommate at times. Sasha will be Bennie Salazar's assistant for twelve years. Robert Freeman is exposed to a difficult decision, Sasha loves him, but he will show his preference for Drew, Sasha's boyfriend. It is a time of smoking hash and strong joints, he has already shared some. Someone is heading towards the East River, and then there is himself and Drew at something like a beach:

It's made entirely out of garbage: old tires, trash, splintered wood, and glass and filthy paper and old plastic bags tapering gradually into the East River... Then he begins to undress... Drew picks his way to where garbage and water meet. An angular slab of concrete juts out, the failed foundation of something long forgotten... (Egan, 2010, p. 235)

They both plunch into the water, Rob is caught in a current, and there is an intendedly enigmatic ending of the episode. He has a vision of freedom, "A distant tugboat jutting out its rubbery lip. The Statue of Liberty. A thunder of wheels on the Brooklyn Bridge, which looks like the inside of a harp (Egan, 2010, p. 237)." Sasha used to play the harp, at this moment there is an unfolding of body and mind, will he ever be rescued? Will this Euridyce be saved by that very version of Orpheus's lyre, Sasha's harp? And he hears, or seems to hear her words: "*Fight! Fight! Fight* (Egan, 2010, p. 238)!"

There is still another way of interpreting Robert's search for freedom, when we compare it with Orpheus's role in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "Orpheus had abstained from the love of women... he was the first of the Thracian people to transfer his love to young boys, and enjoy their brief springtime, and early flowering, this side of manhood (Ovid, 10, pp. 1-85)." Rob's quest would then be to imitate the semi-god at the crucial time when he knows for sure that Eurydice will never be back, and a second visit to the underworld is simply not allowed.

In *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, the atmosphere of decay visits the Academia: "Egan's novels are not *about* academics. They do, though, universally focus more heavily on the academy than would be necessary if

strictly representing society... what we might term an anxiety of academia (Eve, 2015, p. 1).” Mindy will leave her mildly anodyne life and studies at Berkeley, and will marry Lou, giving up her academic career for a promising future of luxury and adventure. She does not love him. As for Alex’s wife, Rebecca, she plays Euridyce in the life that she holds: “... prematurely graying hair... short of sleep... a fragile, harried academic slaving to finish a book while teaching two courses and chairing several committees (Egan, 2010, pp. 359-360).” Alex had been Sasha’s flirt for the night.

Orphic Rituals

Orpheus’s legend has perpetuated itself over the years in different versions. Orphistic rituals have conjured up the memory of the hero, and they focus on the healing or curative power that the son to Apollo may have possessed. As Guthrie states: “This less worthy but certainly popular side of Orphism is represented for us again by the charms or incantations of Orpheus...”, and he keeps arguing on: “As founder of mystery-religions, Orpheus was first to reveal to men the meaning of rites of initiation (teletai). We read of this in both Plato and Aristophanes (Guthrie, 1935, pp. 17-18).” They obey to a transgressive attitude in life and the aim is at spirituality, which includes healthy habits like vegetarianism (Pythagoras), or a cult to the sun as in Aeschylus’s version of the classic myth, together with the desire to achieve spiritual fulfillment on earth, the kind of pursuit that Egan’s characters aim at in a higher or lesser degree: “For the Orphics, also, initiation and the accompanying purification were necessary, but they added a demand for righteousness and moral purity (Nilson, 1940, p. 116).”

The following piece of the novel, may read as an orphic ritual. Sasha, a thirty five years old girl looking younger than her age at the time, is professionally attached to Bennie Salazar and the world of music. Her feelings of fragility and pain, coming from a sad experience in early childhood, have made her deviate her conduct into stealing other people’s objects in order to assert her own personality: “*Look, a scarf! A kid’s bright yellow scarf with pink stripes...* At home she’d washed the scarf by hand and folded it neatly. It was one of the things she liked best (Egan, 2010, p. 16).” Her search for purity is obstructed by an original weakness, and she pursues it desperately in a deviation from the curative process. Coz, her therapist, like a modern Orpheus (in the sense of shaman) is trying to help her cure herself: “...*leaving it*. That would be the cure, although Coz never used words like ‘cure’ (Egan, 2010, p. 4).” In the meantime, as a help to the anxiety, she uses Xanax: “Sasha opened her purse, took out the wallet, unearthed her vial of Xanax, and popped one between her teeth. They worked faster if you chewed them (Egan, 2010, p. 12).” The desire is for salvation, personal realization and it works almost as a prayer or mantra: “Find a band to manage/ Understand the news/ Study Japanese/ Practice the harp (Egan, 2010, p. 7),” her desperate need to be happy utterly removed from her canvass. Could the essence of Orpheus, his music, make an effect upon her?

...Sasha was keenly aware of Coz behind her, waiting. She wanted badly to please him, to say something like It was a turning point; everything feels different now, or I called Lizzie and we made up finally, or I’ve picked up the harp again, or just I’m changing I’m changing I’m changing: I’ve changed! Redemption, transformation God how she wanted these things. Every day, every minute. Didn’t everyone? (Egan, 2010, p. 20)

Bennie Salazar at his forties undergoes the same kind of orphic ritual that Sasha leads within the more sophisticated context of his 45 storey office at the apartment building in East side Manhattan. As a record executive, he is able to pay eight thousand dollars for gold flakes. His search is a deviated desire to achieve the purity of youth, the time he had met Sasha (Eurydice) at a Conduits gig at the Pyramid Club, and then the

memories of his high school gang, Scotty, Alice, Jocelyn and Rhea. His mantra, the wish to "Kissing mother superior (Egan, 2010, p. 43)," and recover the moment of truth when he first found the "Stop/Go", a band of young sisters, nuns, whose "sound was gritty, and simple and catchy (Egan, 2010, p. 22)." There is also a shamanistic figure in off mockingly and repeatedly referred to as Dr. Beet, but the curative process that Bennie provides for himself, in the form of gold flakes that he adds to his coffee to conjure up his sexual drive, comes from "a book on Aztec medicine that gold and coffee together were believed to ensure sexual potency...pinched a few gold flakes between his trembling fingers, and released them into his cup (Egan, 2010, p. 25)." The thing is, will Bennie be able to turn his Eurydice back? As in any orphic ritual, he appears as an outsider, incapable of belonging to the very exclusive club that his ex-wife had fully integrated in. It is his nine years old son, Christopher, who finds the accurate words, the aim of the ritual: "It's, like, waking me up from the inside (Egan, 2010, p. 30)." All in all Bennie is a lost case in the novel, actually most of the characters are.

They appear as lonely figures of misconnections or unfulfilled dreams, even when there are *ingredients* to think that they could have done better in life, and this is where their true humanity lays, in their imperfect claims. The somehow transgressive attitude shows in certain details of their daily life. Spiritually they feel away from the Establishment, a characteristic of the orphic world, and there are some odd features which suggest a certain mood. Kitty Jackson orders a richly dressed salad, only to exclude most of it:

She turns her attention to her Cobb salad... she eats all her lettuce, approximately 2 ½ bites of chicken and several tomato wedges. She ignores: olives, blue cheese, boiled eggs, bacon and avocado in other words, all the parts of the Cobb salad that, technically speaking, *make it a Cobb salad*. (Egan, 2010, p. 197)

The anecdote suggests their nexus to a former period of purity. Its appeal is to the moment when Orpheus and his wife were one single essence, earlier in time to Eurydice's being forced by Aristaeus, the shepherd, in Virgil's description of the classic myth (Lee, 1996, p. 9). Or, in Egan's version, previous to Miles's intended rape. We also find Sasha avidly devouring huge quantities of lettuce, and she salutes the detective who follows her: "...over bowls of steamed vegetables... eating healthy food... (Egan, 2010, p. 225)." In like manner La Doll leaves the publicity firm that she had been working for, and she becomes Dolly, a regenerated woman. She and her daughter Lulu set a shop selling high quality food. She selects the best selection of her fruit orders, for Lulu and herself, as in a purifying rite:

Now and then Dolly would get a shipment of star fruit, and she always made sure to put a few aside to eat with Lulu. She would bring them back to the small house they shared at the end of a quiet street. After supper, the radio on, windows open to the yawning night, she and Lulu would feast on the sweet, strange flesh. (Egan, 2010, p. 189)

A faithful cult to the sun is also part of the Orphic ritual that Egan's characters pursue in a higher or lesser degree. Scotty Hausmann preserves the purity of Orpheus, of a moaning Orpheus at times. The infirmity in his eyes comes from an obsession to look at the sun with eyes full open. Orpheus used to watch the sun from Mount Pangaion, a respectful salute and recognition to Apollo, his father. In Egan's narrative an assorted variety of moments in the curvature of the Earth make the sun look like a precise barometer of the people's *tempus*, moods, falls and rises. At a time in the novel, when Ted has grown older, and Sasha has settled, he visits his niece in the California desert, the climax of peace and wisdom is beautifully depicted as magic, and she fits within the exact position of the sun:

And for an instant he would remember Naples: sitting with Sasha in her tiny room; the jolt of surprise and delight he'd felt when the sun finally dropped into the center of her window and was captured inside her circle of wire.

Now he turned to her, grinning. Her hair and face aflame with orange light.
 "See," Sasha muttered, eyeing the sun. "It's mine." (Egan, 2010, p. 267)

In Sylvia Plath's *Journals* (the closest to an autobiography), there is an entry from 25th February 1957, where the poet shows how her problematic life rises at the sight of the sun. And she confesses that her only cult is to the sun: "...having blasted through conventional morality, and come to my own morality. Which is the commitment to body & mind: to faith in battering out a good life. No God but the sun, anyway (Plath, 1957, p. 1)."

However, orphic rituals read as Jeremiads, and there is abundant influence from mythology in the Christian world, as Linforth states:

...many centuries later, it was Greeks who built the tremendous structure of Christian theology out of the material supplied by the Orient. Such theologically minded Greeks, operating with the materials of the mysteries the facts of the ritual, the gods to whom it was addressed, and the emotional experience of the participants, composed poems in which they told the myths on which the rites were based, found a place for these myths in a wider and more comprehensive theology, and explained the manner and significance of the rites themselves. (Linforth, 1941, p. 294)

Orpheus's legend and the figure of Jesus Christ share details in common. There is evidence of a paradoxical origin (being both human and divine). The vulnerable quality of the semi-god, love, curative powers (Jesus' miracles), violent death, the endurance of his head as a further symbol of eternity and The Spirit... Spirituality after death that the Greek myth perceives as the purity of the Arts, or the desire of purity at least. Let us not forget that Apollo sharply silenced Orpheus's head in the end, as Carlos García Gual recalls in his last book (García, 2016, p. 112).

Orpheus and Euridyce: On Time Passing

"Time's a goon, right (Egan, 2010, p. 145)?" Egan's characters often suggest. The effects of time in married couples are best exemplified in the *duets* composed by Bennie/ Stephanie, Ted Hollander/ Susan, or Lou/ Jocelyn, Lou/ Mindy. They all split up somehow in due course. Bennie and Stephanie's lives are within the contours of Crandale Country Club, the exclusive circle of the very rich. Stephanie plays tennis with Nellie, one of the most distinguished members of the club, and this is a social rise for a rock and roll girl, but Bennie will fully participate by having sex with her. Stephanie cannot cope with the infidelity, simply because time has made it hurt beyond the reasonable parameters of pain. The degrading force of the years passed together, Egan suggests, is responsible for the final crisis:

Her only thought was of getting away, as if she were carrying a live grenade from inside the house, so that when it exploded, it would destroy just herself... She wanted to cry but she couldn't. The feeling was too deep. Why was this worse than the other times? But it was. (Egan, 2010, p. 154)

Ted Hollander and Susan are also faded figures of love, and time has made them look strangers to each other. They used to be happy once upon a time: "Let's make sure it's always like this (Egan, 2010, p. 265)," Susan had wished. As for Ted,

...each disappointment Ted felt for his wife, each incremental deflation, was accompanied by a seizure of guilt... His desire was so small in the end that Ted could slip it inside his desk or a pocket and forget about it, and this gave him a feeling of safety and accomplishment. (Egan, 2010, p. 241)

Lou's decay and the passing of time is best exemplified from Jocelyn's perspective: "How did you get so

old? Was it all at once, in a day, or did you peter out bit by bit? When did you stop having parties? Did everyone else get old too, or was it just you (Egan, 2010, p. 97)?" Or: "It's finished. Everything went past, without me (Egan, 2010, p. 98)," the realization of where life is heading us to, in due course: "So this is it what cost me all that time. A man who turned out to be old, a house that turned out to be empty (Egan, 2010, p. 99)."

There is a sore bitter description of the reasons why Lou and Mindy had married. The tie Orpheus Eurydice, the real nexus of love was between Mindy and Albert at the safari, a reminder theme of Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." The affair proved short indeed, and Mindy left him as improper. She was not ready to live in Mombasa. A fastening up in the authoritative narrative voice, manipulating time towards a further future, proves the irony of the election. Mindy's obsession for adventure and luxuries will be sharply cut:

Lou and Mindy dance close together, their whole bodies touching, but Mindy is thinking of Albert, as she will periodically after marrying Lou and having two daughters... On paper he'll be penniless, and Mindy will end up working as a travel agent to support her little girls. (Egan, 2010, p. 94)

Orpheus and Quantum Physics

The one single figure that appears wholly authentic, so as to say, is Scotty. At his presence everybody follows as if hook winked or taken by his personal integrity. He represents purity before the fall, and may be regarded as a semi-god, a real son of Apollo, Orpheus previous to Eurydice's fall and disentanglement. And even when Orpheus moans on the impossibility to rescue his wife from the abyss of the underworld, and when ignorance in the world will prevail, he holds intact the experience of love in his moaning, his energy untouched. The description of the character resembles the legendary hero: "It was the magic of his music and its mystical potency that made men attribute to him the magical arts in the rituals of the mysteries (Linforth, 1941, p. 296)." In his youth, Scotty's unity of body, mind and musical instrument conforms an attitude that big audiences share. As a modern Orpheus moving rocks, animals and trees alike, the entire team of players go to listen to him:

On warm days, Scotty plays his guitar. Not the electric he uses for Flaming Dildos gigs, but a lap steel guitar that you hold a different way. Scotty actually built this instrument: bent the wood, glued it, painted on the shellac. Everyone gathers around, there's no way not to when Scotty plays. One time the entire J.V. soccer team climbed up from the athletic field to listen, looking around in their jerseys and long red socks like they didn't know how they got there. Scotty is magnetic. (Egan, 2010, p. 47)

He is the semi-god before his quest. The vulnerability of this modern hero will show in due course, his essence imprisoned in a carcass that has partaken life and endurance, his "word" the unique truth from his lips. Scotty may read as well as part of an orphic ritual, like Sasha, like Bennie, in fact most of the characters can be interpreted from a different perspective or approach. It is the degree of purity that varies, and in the case of Scotty (like a vulnerable god), he comes out utterly fortified. There is also a mantra. Like Orpheus's moaning at the impossibility to recover true love, the chorus of his song: "*What the fuck?/ What the fuck?/ What the fuck?*" (Egan, 2010, p. 52), shows a dismayed attitude towards the illusion that love is: "*You said you were a fairy princess...*" (Egan, 2010, p. 52)." And there is also guilt, as when he goes to the dry cleaner's with his jacket: "Why you clean? You already clean, bag not open, you waste your money (Egan, 2010, p. 107)." But the dominant attitude is that he is a man who talks to gods and goddesses, pure essence beyond human foibles and tiny dreams:

I felt no shame... there was only an infinitesimal difference, a difference so small that it barely existed except as a

figment of the human imagination, between working in a tall green glass building on Park Avenue and collecting litter in a park, there may have been no difference at all. (Egan, 2010, p. 107)

Scotty *shines*, or seems to shine because he obeys to the laws of Nature. Like a vulnerable Orpheus, he may suffer the hell of the environment: "...like a scientist unwittingly inhaling toxic fumes... I was boiling in my *lab*, had through *sheer physical proximity*, been infected by that same delusion and in my dragged state had come to believe I was Excluded: condemned...(Egan, 2010, p. 112)." But in front of Bennie, his former mate of youth, unity before Bennie's fall, his essence emerges strong and vital, setting an enormous striped bass in front of Bennie's desk. To Bennie's astonishment asking: "Shopping?" the materialistic logo, Scotty's triumphant's reply: "Fishing (Egan, 2010, p. 113)", reassuring nature, shows one of the climatic moments of the text. He feels the need to *rescue* his friend Bennie Salazar to life, and his indulgent smile is also extensive to Sasha.

Orpheus and Eurydice were essence once, as in true love. Einstein's theory of the particles implies that when a whole splits, and one of the parts is hurt, both its sides suffer exactly the same amount of pain, and right at the same time. Mythology, Orpheus's need to rescue Euridyce from Hades, just shows the semi-god's natural disposition. He is just helplessly suffering the pain of hell. Ortega's *Meditations on Don Quixote* make this evident in a similar way, suggesting the issue that, unless *I* save the world, *I* am not safe. It is not casual that Lulu, Dolly's daughter is making plans to study particle physics. This implies the concept of energy and how it works in time and space. Quantum theory, elementary particles, good vibrations, telepathy, telekinesis and prayers may be part of the curative process of life:

[Lulu] No one says 'viral' anymore... I mean, may be thoughtlessly, the way we still say "connect" or "transmit" those old mechanical metaphors that have nothing to do with how information travels. See, reach isn't describable in terms of cause and effects anymore: it's simultaneous. It's faster than the speed of light, that's actually been measured. So now we study particle physics. (Egan, 2010, p. 352)

Scotty's last appearance in public, led by Lulu on stage, aims at the apotheosis which may also heal the reader. At that very moment author and reader are a single one, sharing the glorious minute of Art and emotion. The healing device of the text somehow contradicts Egan's postmodern structure and form. The magic achieved at the concert is a wink to old Woodstock, families celebrating together the communion of life, children's erratic sounds, "th blu nyt/ th stRs u can't c/ th hum tht nevr gOs awy (Egan, 2010, p. 379)", and the purity of communication challenging the standard: "By infusing her narrative with punk purity, Egan radically distances herself from postmodern simulation and a digital culture which propagates sterility in the name of an artificial notion of purity (Moling, 2016, p. 73)."

Uncertainty and delirium falters. Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* participates of the same sensitivity and climax, and he also uses the world of music as effective device, but in Pynchon, the aim is at *paranoia*, which makes the reader doubt about the real quality of Oedipa Mas perception. She gets to find her husband, Mucho Mas, a disc jockey playing music at a disco, and she hears (or *seems* to hear) Mucho Mas's words celebrating the true communication of the sensitive. For a moment they share, or seem to share the same attitude, appealing to the magic of what might have been named as achievement, but in Egan's text what we feel is accomplishment. It is true that the introduction of power point information as part of the narrative process, makes the characters disappear toying with the idea of an illusionary myth: "[Egan] ...it felt strange and interesting, like a different language...(Egan, 2015, p. 1)." And it is an impact to the readers that she makes her characters go all of a sudden, like *melting into thin air*, to use Shakespeare's words. All in all, each chapter

reads as realism, and the whole narrative seems to be part of the curative process of the novel, that makes the reader utterly absolved: "Egan embraces the virtues and pleasures of traditional storytelling delivered through a wholly new, digital format (Kirby, 2013, p. 12)." It is the spirit in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, or Goethe's assertions of some inner truth: "...pure expression of an internal vigor in its relation to the world, the spiritualization of an extraordinary sphere of reality...(Simmel, 2007, p. 85)."

There is also a reference to Black Orpheus in the figure of the negro Bix, a generous man who has to put up with Lizzie's parents, and his slightly conventional girlfriend. But these are side figures in the narrative. The question now is: Can the Academia rescue the purity of the world as it is? : "Egan's novels seem to play on... blurring the boundaries between fiction and critique; the seeping of the university into everyday life (Eve, 2014, pp. 2/15)."

To Rilke's Orpheus sonnet 1, book 1: "There the tree rises. Oh pure surpassing!/ Oh Orpheus sings! Oh great tree of sound/And all is silent, And from this silence arise/ New beginnings, intimations, changes." The answer seems to be book 1, sonnet 5: "He winds through everything./ And is it not much if from time to time He broods over/ The hanging rose hips for some days yet?" The ambiguity of the affirmation shows on Egan's lonely characters, oddly conscious of their own reality, and yet incapable to come out in life in a sound way. It is a story of failure, of the natural failure that any human life is in the long run. But it is also a story of reassurance. Reminiscences of a former purity remind the characters and the reader alike of the primal essence that time erodes. Rilke's ambiguity or wish, runs parallel to Miles's effective words: "Sure, everything is ending... but not yet (Egan, 2010, p. 151)." Both attitudes are apocalyptic, one flows from the essence of high poetry, while the other recalls words that may be currently heard.

However, Egan slows down the rhythm to show one the most magic passages in the book. If we take this separate, the episode aims at realism, but further on, it recreates the meaning of beauty, and how the artistic may talk of new beginnings and glad tidings. There is ambiguity, but there is also uncertainty in Rilke's verses (sonnet 3, book 1):

A god has the power. But tell me, shall a man
Wring the same from a slender lyre?
His senses are awry. And there stand no temples of Apollo
At the crossing of two heart-lines.

Song, by Your example, does not concern desire,
Nor pursuit and attainment of its object;
Song is to be. Trifling for the god...

This is not, my lad, a matter of your passions, though
Your voice throw open your lips, -learn...
True singing is breath of another kind.
A breath that aims nowhere. Pneuma within the god. A zephyr.

Perhaps the fiber of the poem shows the reason why Ted Hollander postpones the encounter with his niece Sasha, and experiences the proximity of the artistic in Naples, at the Museo Nazionale contemplating the marble sculpture of "the Orpheus and Eurydice": "Orpheus and Eurydice in love and newly married; Eurydice dying of a snakebite while fleeing the advances of a shepherd... And then the hapless instant when, out of fear for his bride as she stumbled in the passage, Orpheus forgot himself and turned (Egan, 2010, p. 246)." Sasha's limp is an obvious reproduction of Eurydice. Being a youngster, she lives her particular Hades of red dress and

black boots. There shows the ignorance of her young voice versus the intensity (almost ecstasy) of exquisite Ted: "...a fibrillating excitement such as he hadn't felt for years in response to a work of art, compounded by further excitement that such excitement was still possible (Egan, 2010, p. 247)." As in the legend, he would not dare touch his niece.

Conclusion

The narrative's aim is apocalyptic, in Sasha, in Scotty. Facts show the general degradation of the Arts, the world in the hands of huge corporations which have manipulated even music and the Academia at the expense of humanity. Each of the characters preserve traces of a former purity that may even challenge time passing. Particle physics describe how the mechanism works, and a sort of endurable process is already on, providing a positive end to the legend. Orpheus's head, removed from his body, will continue to sing. The energy remains unchanged. There is a healing effect on the reader, so that Egan's categorization as a post-modern writer is challenged by belief, possibility and truth, but then the bitter eclecticism of her voice echoes on in the reader as a reminder of stumble and fall, and the novel holds itself within a middle ground between uncertainty and hope, following the dynamics of short-story writing, the eternal dualism unresolved. Ted Hollander, obsessed with durability and eternity, like Miles, like Jocelyn, like Bosco... walks the palaces of the old city and dreams: "He imagined he was an element of the palace itself, a sensate molding or step whose fate it was to witness the ebb and flow of generations... (Egan, 2010, p. 265)."

Egan's characters seem to be heading West, it is in western California that Jocelyn, Rhea, Alice, Bennie, Scotty and Lou first met. There is a flavour of the former purity of youth. The damaging action of time occurs East of the United States, around upper East Manhattan. A century ago, an assorted variety of characters populated the center of New York City, as in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, their only hope was heading West. Scotty's climax is like a step upwards, and Ted Hollander's moment of truth occurs in Naples. The country life still remains a promise for Dolly and his daughter Lulu. And the intensity of their personal struggles seems to pervade all the narrative carefully enveloped in bitterness and eclecticism. The characters, as true human beings keep within themselves, some promise of a former youth.

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