

***Parade: A Novel* by Rachel Cusk, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2024, ISBN: 978-0374610043, 208 pages, ₹1,579.**

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Rachel Cusk's *Parade* is a novel that is deeply interested in other people's lives and their continued reality. Memory becomes a major aspect with which characters form their identity, question their present reality. The novel presents characters that appears, disappears, sometimes overlap, there are several characters who are named "G" and they all identified themselves as artists. The narrative is peculiarly set where the voices of the characters shift from "I" to "We" and the result is deliberately made to create unsettling feelings amongst the reader. Cusk denies the reader the comfort of chronology, a continuous narrative that is normally provided by the characters but here Cusk asks a question behind this narrative experimentation, there lies a deeper concern that, how do we understand ourselves when the past through which we recognise ourselves is unstable?



Memory runs subtly in the novel, it does not appear as a nostalgia nor does it try recover what has been lost but it portrays a gentle reminiscence of what has been suffered. Cusk's characters look back upon their past, their childhoods, marriages, artistic career and those even which have shaped their identity. These acts of recollections rarely serve any certainty, the past changes upon who remembers it and from what stage of life it is being remembered from. What seemed like an ordinary ritual may appear cruel when it is recalled in the later stages of life. Remembering, in Cusk's *Parade* therefore does not simply recall an event but it alters a person's identity. In *Parade*, an individual's identity is already uncertain, the recurrence of the name "G" of the different artists does not let reader get settle with one story comfortably,

rather it shifts the energy with different themes in different individual. One “G” cannot be understood with conventionality of the narrative and its biographical details before the narrative moves elsewhere and another “G” appears with his distinct characteristics. Individual begin to echo each other voices and their lives appears to have been mixed with each other.

Human memory does not preserve life as an orderly sequence, some parts of it remains vivid and some of them disappears as people grow; people from different phases of life connected through some association while other relationships fade away with time. For example, one of the characters in the novel, Mauro’s memory of his mother, he recalls as a child, he wanted to approach her while she was attempting to write behind the closed doors, because the child’s first instinct is to go to his mother, but the close the door in his life symbolises those times when he needed his mother but she was not present with. Although, throughout his life closed door holds a significant memory but now he understands it differently. Memory has a complicated relationship with the past and the present, looking backward means an individual needs to encounter the person that they were, whose desire and wants from life seems strangely remote. Cusk repeatedly confronts this distance by showing how memory continues to promise continuity but the remembrance disrupts this continuity by showing an individual the mirror of their past and forcing them to confront some difficult phases of their life.

In *Parade*, art has shown as an another means of preserving experiences. Any form of art survives the moment of its creation and the story behind it, every piece of art contains something that solely belongs to the artist alone, their hurt, their trauma, their past, it all belongs to the artist alone. But *Parade* remains suspicious of representation by showing that art does not reveal an authentic self of the artist more than memory does, the image of the upside down painting that has been described in the novel demonstrates that the object remains materially the same but changing its familiarisation changes how it is being perceived. Memory does the similar thing where an event can not be changed but its meaning can be changed if recalled from a different point of life. The past, therefore is not shown stable just because it has already happened.

Parade is not just a novel of artist or making of the art. It is a novel about difficulty of constructing an identity from the experiences that are continually being reinterpreted, memory connects different versions of life but it also exposes the distance between them. Cusk ultimately leaves reader with this uncomfortable possibility that perhaps memory is not the stable centre from which we remember our lives or perhaps it is created through the very act of remembrance. But the past is still there, only it’s always changed, when we recall it through

a different version of ourselves. In *Parade*, the self therefore resembles the novel's own continuity; fleeting identities emerging and passing, leaving traces behind. What remains is not a single true version of a person but a collection of views, of relationships, images and memories through which we continue to try to recognise ourselves.

Works Cited:

Cusk, Rachel. *Parade: A Novel*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024.