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A Day's Time: The One-Day Novel and the Temporality of the Everyday

The day lives us and in exchange
We it

—James Schuyler, *Hymn to Life* (1974)

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Introduction

THIS ESSAY PRESENTS an initial, exploratory investigation of the one-day-ness of the one-day novel—to ask what the effects of this temporal frame, in literary form, might be. I approach this question largely through the developing critical field of everyday life studies, in particular on literature and the everyday. My main intended audience is fellow literary critics; as I detail below, there is a surprising paucity of literary criticism focused specifically on the narrative of the single day, and I hope in this essay to launch further discussions of the form, particularly insofar as instances of this form can also (paradoxically) be read as novels of the everyday. But I am also addressing theorists of everyday life studies more generally. Ben Highmore has recently suggested that the “constructive and inventive” nature of the study of the everyday means that the kind of “theory” that would be useful in this field might be found not in the “dense and abstruse form of writing” where we usually expect to find it but, among other places, “in the pages of a novel.”¹ If this is so, then perhaps the one-day novel is an appropriate form on which to base a more general investigation of the relationship between the single day and the everyday.

I begin with a brief survey of the critical fields with which this essay engages. The centrality of temporality to everyday life studies is not in question: “Everyday life is above all a temporal term,” says Rita Felski in her essay “The Invention of Everyday Life”;² Martin Heidegger insisted in *Being and Time* that “basically nothing other is meant by everydayness than temporality.”³ There also appears to be consensus on what constitutes this temporality. For example, Henri Lefebvre, one of the founders of everyday life studies, asserted that “everyday life is made of

recurrences";⁴ Felski's important feminist revision of Lefebvre is equally insistent upon the repetitive temporality of the everyday. Although Felski reframes repetition and its related modality, habit, to insist on their potentially positive qualities, while Lefebvre and other influential early theorists of the everyday in modernity (such as Georg Simmel or Sigmund Freud) tend to regard repetition as damaging or negative, nevertheless there is a consistent focus across the critical field on the "every" of "everyday" rather than the "day." One notable exception can be found in the work of Michael Sheringham, whose book *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* includes a section on "The Space of the Day" in which he reflects on ways that "the figure of the day can provide access to the totality which is the everyday."⁵ Sheringham's work indicates the untapped potential for everyday life studies in focusing on the temporal frame of the single day.

Drawing heavily as it does on literary texts in his investigation of theories of the everyday, Sheringham's work has been central to the growing interest in the everyday in contemporary literary criticism. It is worth noting that most of the recent literary critical works that specifically engage and interrogate the concept of the everyday and its cognates are focused on modernist literature. The reasons for this are most likely to do with the transformation in the way everyday life was both conceptualized and experienced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the extent that the emergence of everyday life as a concept is frequently dated to around this time.⁶ Indeed, as I will discuss in more detail below, the modernist period produced two of the most celebrated English language single-day novels, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). In my own work thus far, I have paid sustained attention to the temporality of modernist texts of the everyday, but have not singled out the one-day novel for particular attention as such.⁷ Interestingly, other key critics in this field such as Liesl Olson and Lorraine Simm have explicitly chosen the term "ordinary" in preference to "everyday." Their reasons vary, and of course the two terms are not interchangeable.⁸ But one outcome of this choice is that the question of (daily) temporality does not press upon their analyses as it might have done had their defining term been "everyday." By contrast, and as the title suggests, Michael Sayeau's *Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative* explicitly engages the term "everyday" as the antithesis of the "event." I discuss these terms in more detail later; for now, the intersection between Sayeau's work and my concerns are best expressed where he observes that "modernist writers persistently resist the notion that works must be constructed according to a normative rhythm of eventfulness and uneventfulness. The most

obvious example of this is the advent of the circadian, 'single-day' novel, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, which compresses the conventional temporal and thematic range of the realist novel into a few hours of an ordinary day during which little, according to usual literary standards, happens.⁹ While I do turn in this essay to the question of what "happens" in the novel of the single day, I am more concerned with how the one-day novel might present its happenings, or nonhappenings; the specific opportunities offered by this literary form.

The one-day novel has received only superficial attention from literary critics specifically in terms of its overall temporal structure; still less has there been much attempt made to link it with contemporary theories of the everyday.¹⁰ This is despite the fact that certain canonical one-day novels frequently form the jumping-off point for theoretical discussions of the everyday, the most obvious example being the discussion of *Ulysses* that opens Lefebvre's foundational text of everyday life theory, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*.¹¹ And where critical attention is paid to the temporal aspects of the one-day novel, this tends to pass quickly over the fact of it being a narrative of a single day without sustained reflection on the implications of this structure. So, for example, while critics cannot fail to notice and may make passing comment on the one-day structure of *Mrs Dalloway* or *Ulysses*, attention tends quickly to turn to the larger temporal structures that these novels employ—the "tunnelling" method of *Mrs Dalloway*, the mythic structure of *Ulysses*.

Some examples will help illustrate what I see as the lacuna in the current critical field in relation to the one-day novel. On the one hand, there is Robert Wenginger's approach in his essay on the one-day novel as homage to Joyce. Wenginger treats the one-day frame as a "classificatory function" analogous to the Foucauldian author-function that, per Foucault, "permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others."¹² But Wenginger then does little more than note how six other one-day novels are like or unlike *Ulysses*, in various ways, without focusing in particular on the effect of their one-day temporality. On the other hand, there are numerous critics who write on the one-day novel, and who write on temporal aspects of the text, but do not directly address its status precisely as one day. For example, in his landmark work *Fiction and Repetition*, J. Hillis Miller devotes a chapter to each of *Mrs Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*, but makes only passing reference to *Mrs Dalloway*'s one-day structure, famously describing it as "a general day of recollection."¹³ Between these two positions, there is a void around attention to the specific features of the one-day novel as such.

Miller's neglect of this aspect of Woolf's texts is perhaps not surprising, given what appears to be a fundamental incompatibility between repetition (the topic of his book), which by common and critical consensus defines the temporality of the everyday, and the frame of the one-day novel. If the temporality of the everyday is a "lived process of routinization," then this routinization, repetition, habit, and so on—the characteristics of the temporality of dailiness—will in principle be invisible in the text that narrates one day and one day only (IEL 95).¹⁴ But it remains a paradox—one I explore below—that while in principle the one-day novel ought to be very poorly suited to capture everyday temporality, in practice novelists often use the frame of the one-day novel in order to evoke the habits and routines of everyday life.

As with any project that proposes to broach new critical ground, the question of methodology is key. In this case, I had assumed I would need to begin by reading as many one-day novels as possible and making observations about their characteristics and effects. However, it soon became obvious that sustained close reading of any text or texts would, ultimately, be at odds with my larger project. Rather, in order to focus on the specifically formal aspects of this kind of text, I needed to take a more abstract approach. Following Lefebvre in his *Rhythmanalysis* (a text with its own specific relevance to the topic at hand), I propose that "instead of going from concrete to abstract, one starts with full consciousness of the abstract in order to arrive at the concrete."¹⁵ I will of course give some concrete examples from one-day texts to illustrate my discussion. But since this does not pretend to be a comprehensive survey of all one-day novels (however one might define such a thing), it is more appropriate to pursue what might be characterized as a primarily deductive approach, offering initial observations about what the one-day narrative might offer in principle, and testing these hypotheses out against what some such novels do in practice.

Questions of scope and focus should, however, be given a little further consideration. David Higdon argues that "the circadian novel's creation had largely to wait for the time-obsessed twentieth century"; a literary history of the one-day novel is beyond the scope of this essay, but part of the development of a full narrative of the one-day novel in literature would have to address questions of period and, indeed, nationality.¹⁶ Of course any discussion of the one-day novel cannot and should not avoid *Mrs Dalloway* and *Ulysses*; indeed, the fact that these novels are also among the most celebrated texts of modernism means they will have significantly influenced our expectations, as readers, of the one-day form. Evidently, however, observations on *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* alone will not get us very far, not least precisely because they are already so overdetermined

as pillars of the twentieth-century literary canon. In fact, what recently (re)turned my own focus to the one-day novel was the observation that a number of relatively prominent twenty-first-century British novels also have this one-day form. What is particularly significant about this observation is that I had initially grouped the novels together as novels of the everyday. The group included John Lanchester's *Mr Phillips* (2000), Jon McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002), Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), and Rachel Cusk's *Arlington Park* (2006).¹⁷ This connection, between the one-day novel and the everyday, becomes somewhat less surprising, however, if we take on board the fact that many of these novelists—Cusk, McEwan, and McGregor in particular—seem particularly indebted to their modernist forbears: writers such as Woolf and Joyce, whose work, as the literary critics cited above have discussed, is characterized by engagement with the everyday.¹⁸ So while in this essay I mainly give examples from the more recent novels, my reading of these texts is consonant with Tom McCarthy's insistence that "the task for contemporary literature is to deal with the legacy of modernism."¹⁹ That is to say, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Ulysses* form touchstones, both implicit and explicit, for my own analysis and for the writers of contemporary one-day novels.

Further questions of scope and definition are raised by Miller's reference to what is arguably another of Woolf's one-day novels. Miller refers to "these two days" of *Between the Acts*, presumably on the basis that the novel begins on the evening of one day, and ends on the evening of the next.²⁰ But one could equally argue that *Between the Acts* covers one day, since it spans a period of roughly twenty-four hours. The problems of terminology here are well expressed by Higdon's insistence on the term "circadian" rather than one-day "because the latter phrase is potentially misleading since a number of circadian novels take less than twenty-four hours."²¹ But the phrase "one-day" would, of course, be most accurate if one were concerned with novels of the "day," with daylight hours, or indeed waking hours. I include within the scope of this project novels of a time span ranging from that of, say, *Mrs Dalloway* (that is, from after waking until before sleeping—here mid-morning to late evening) to the full twenty-four hours of *Between the Acts*, or, to give a more recent example, Nick Barlay's 1997 novel of the North London underworld, *Curvy Lovebox*. But I retain the term "one-day" for its explicit allusion to the dailiness that is also part of conceptualizing the everyday.

What follows falls into two main sections, prompted by a consideration of the kind of questions the very idea of a one-day novel might raise. The questions I have chosen to pursue are those of scale, and of agency, with a final short section on the temporal perspective offered by the single

day before I conclude. In the first section, I consider the role played by the focus on detail enabled by the single day form as well as the apparent problems arising from this focus for a definition of the one-day novel as a text of the everyday. I then offer a proposed solution to this problem by considering the significance of the day's comparability with other days, developed through Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of "compearance." In the second section, I begin by reflecting on the failure of the one-day novel in general to address the working day; move on to ask how one-day novels pursue questions prompted by the Marxist focus on what can be done in a day (particularly from a feminist perspective); and then consider how the "event" has been articulated in recent writing on literature and the everyday, suggesting that the one-day novel might challenge both the valorization of the "event" and nuance its conceptualization. My final section places the one-day novel into dialogue with a new theory of narrative temporality to suggest that the one-day novel has a particularly, and perhaps peculiarly, future-orientated aspect.

Scale: Detail, Transcendence, Comparability

The first question raised by the one-day text that I want to address here is, broadly: what is the scale of human experience? One of the many paradoxical features of the single day is its status as representative of the life of which it is also a part—as both metaphor and synecdoche. Rachel Bowlby's comment that in *Mrs Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* Woolf attempts "to find a literary form for the representation of daily life, or to put the whole of 'life' into a single day"²² might not be appropriate to every one-day novel, but this impulse to use the manageable temporal frame of the single day to at least touch on the less-manageable frame of a whole life is perceptible in most. It is, however, precisely this capacity that makes the focus on the dailiness—or better, the day-ness—of the one-day novel difficult. As Sheringham observes, both the day and the street are microcosms; thus we can adapt his contention that it is "easier to make the street a symbol or microcosm than see it simply as a street" (*EL* 386) and observe that it is easier to make the day a synecdoche or metaphor than to see it simply as a day.

Indeed, none of the novels I describe confine themselves strictly to narrating a day's events, by which I mean events only taking place on that day. It is perhaps difficult to imagine a text that did only this—though some come close, such as Barlay's urgently in-the-moment *Curvy Lovebox*. *Mrs Dalloway*, of course, includes several personal histories through its "tunneling" methods; the reader is given, as Miller puts it "the 'story' of

Mrs Dalloway . . . something which happened long before the single day in the novel's present."²³ McEwan's *Saturday* employs a similar technique, though unlike *Mrs Dalloway* his novel is focalized exclusively through a single character, meaning we only have access to one individual history from within. McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* strictly alternates between a narrative of (or within) a single day, and the narrative of his protagonist's discovery of her pregnancy and its repercussions over a number of months. Cusk's *Arlington Park*, with its series of chapters focalized by different characters, moves sequentially through the day; but in addition to devoting much of the narrative to events in the characters' past (using a similar technique to that found in *Saturday*), this novel includes a chapter whose narrative present explicitly extends over the course of several weeks. In many ways, then, these narratives support a more general application of James Hafley's assertion about *Mrs Dalloway*, that Woolf "used the single day . . . to show that there is no such thing as a single day";²⁴ that is, while having the single day as their primary temporal structure, these texts extend beyond this frame. Once again, the one-day novel opens into a paradox: that the attempt to show a single day only draws our attention to the fact that every single day is so inevitably freighted with resonances from all the days that have gone before, and anticipations of those that will (usually) go after, as to be practically impossible to depict in glorious isolation, even—and this is a genuine question—if one wanted to.

Just one day may seem, then, on the face of it, completely inadequate as a time-frame within which to express anything significant about life more generally. Yet as Sheringham notes, reflecting on the apparent incompatibility between the quotidian and a particular day, "we will not catch hold of everydayness if we sever it from given days" (*EL* 364). Indeed, novels that have more expansive time-frames—even those that set out to focus on the everyday—might risk giving themselves inadequate space therein to explore the fine detail of life. The one-day novel effects what Weninger calls "the expansion of time through the reduction of time,"²⁵ as the slower pace of the one-day novel enables the inclusion of more detail. Thus the one-day novel might in principle appear to confirm the political position that insists on the significance of minute detail in human experience—that the scale of human experience is very small, if you like. This is the kind of politics expressed by Woolf both implicitly and explicitly in her essays and novels: it is not, says the narrator of *Orlando*, "articles by Nick Greene on John Donne nor eight-hour bills nor covenants nor factory acts that matter"—not, in other words, public or institutional events, but "something useless, sudden, violent; something that costs a life; red, blue, purple; a spirt; a splash."²⁶ Or, in

Jacob's Room: "It's not catastrophes, murders, deaths, diseases, that age and kill us; it's the way people look and laugh, and run up the steps of omnibuses."²⁷ So for Woolf, as for many other writers, the narrative of the single day, enabling as it does exploration of the minutiae of daily life, is a form in which the significance of the everyday, upon which she elsewhere insists, can be vividly evoked.

This attention to detail need not, however, conflict with the one-day novel's engagement with very broad sweeps of time (reaching back to the prehistoric, for example, in *Between the Acts*, or evoking the mythological past in *Ulysses*); a wide spatial range; or the impact of larger social structures—indeed, it might be particularly well placed to comment on these last (as in Mulk Raj Anand's 1935 novel *The Untouchable*, a day in the life of a young latrine cleaner in pre-independence India). But the principle put forward in the one-day novel can be summarized in the words of the sociologist of daily time-use Jonathan Gershuny: "There are grander abstractions that we use to simplify the great complexity of the world. . . . But the reality of these is no more than various sorts of aggregates of the physical and mental events of the daily round."²⁸ The one-day novel will inevitably base any critique of larger social structures or historical narratives on sustained attention to the elements of the "daily round"—beginning, necessarily, with the activities and experiences contained within a single day.

The question of scale also raises the fraught issue for everyday life studies of "transcendence." There is an agonistic yet apparently intractable relationship between the everyday and transcendence; if there's one thing to which the everyday is constantly susceptible, it is to being transcended. It is almost a truism that, as Felski puts it, literary representations of everyday life have failure built in, insofar as their "act of magnifying and refracting taken-for granted minutiae transcends the very dailiness it seeks to depict. Literature's heightened sensitivity to the microscopic detail marks its difference from the casual inattentiveness that defines the everyday experience of everyday life" (IEL 90).²⁹ According to this position, simply paying attention to details of daily life inevitably thereby removes them from the category of the everyday.

But I want to interrogate this notion. Does "casual inattentiveness" always define the everyday experience of everyday life? Many of these novels present days in which heightened sensitivity to microscopic detail (on the part of narrator or characters or both) does not, I would argue, remove what is attended to from the realm of the everyday. So when in *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa ecstatically crosses the street, we read this instance on the basis that on other occasions she may cross this street without feeling thus elated.³⁰ Her daughter Elizabeth is exhilarated by an omni-

bus ride, but we are not led to believe that omnibus rides will never be the same again for her, that she will never take one in a state of dismay, or boredom, or disgust, or indifference.³¹ Similarly, in *Arlington Park*, when Maisie Carrington catalogues the grotesque poses into which her daughters' toys have fallen, we are given no sense that her children's bedroom will forever after resemble to her a charnel house.³² Even in *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*, when the narrator describes in agonizingly drawn-out slow motion the impact between a moving car and a small child—does this really “transcend” dailiness? It may make that particular day stand out in the experience of those whom it affected, but it doesn't make a car crash a less everyday occurrence as such. Doesn't crossing the road, or a ride on a bus, or a child's messy bedroom floor, or even, sadly, a road traffic accident, remain lodged in the everyday, experiences that may be had again, by oneself or by others, with similar or different feelings, later that day, on another day?

My own view is that it does, but to support this argument we need to consider more closely what is meant by “everyday” in Felski's formulation. The distinction between an evaluative and an empirical definition of the everyday is helpful here. Under an empirical definition, the everyday would simply mean that which happens routinely, every day (more or less); it would be descriptive rather than offering a value-judgment. By contrast, an evaluative definition would define the everyday as the neglected, mundane, and other such (negatively) value-laden aspects of human existence.³³ It would seem that Felski's definition here is more like the second, evaluative definition, that the everyday is the overlooked or unattended-to. But if we put into play the purely empirical, temporal aspect of the term—that is, as something that happens (more or less) every day, then a particular “act of magnifying” minutiae does not necessarily “transcend” dailiness. What is transformed is the status of those minutiae as unattended-to or otherwise. But events taking place every day are by no means necessarily overlooked. Something different might strike us about our “daily round,” to use Gershuny's phrase, every single day, but (as I've suggested through the examples from novels given above) even if a previously overlooked detail is noticed, an experience given particular value or significance, on one occasion, it need not—it might well not—on the next.

What makes this variability with which we experience our daily lives particularly apparent is in large part our capacity easily to compare one day with another. The single day is, Sheringham asserts, thus “crucial to the currency of lived experience” (EL 364). Or as Neal Alexander puts it, emphasizing the paradoxical quality of daily temporality: “Because of its manifold iterations, everyday life is at once repetitive and unique

each time it is encountered or lived; its monotony is, in fact, constantly renewed, as each day is necessarily different, if only minimally, from the last.³⁴ It is in turn one of the paradoxes of the novel of a single day that it necessarily invites comparison—between the activities, interactions, movements, events, affects, emotions, and experiences apparently bounded within that particular day, and how they might appear, similarly or differently, on another day. While the single day form may appear in principle likely to emphasize the one-off, unique, and unrepeated, the effect of drawing out the significance of selected elements within that day, or in articulating a particularly heightened experience within that day, inevitably involves, by implication, a reflection on how this day might compare with others. It is in so doing that the novel of the single day, regardless of its content, invariably also becomes a novel of the everyday.

The more broadly political, communal aspects of this observation can be elucidated by engaging the concept of “compearance.” This term, taken from the work of the philosopher Nancy (though also existing in the lexicon of Scottish law), is glossed by Berthold Schoene in a recent essay on *Arlington Park* and *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* as a kind of community or communality that is “never a matter of choice, the upshot of purposeful deliberation or signficatory design; it is an existential link that is always already there, coeval and intimately entwined with everybody’s original coming-into-being.”³⁵ Compearance is, as I read it, not based on any constructed sense of “community” based on particular shared characteristics and following on from our emergence into the world. It is instead a term which expresses a fundamental connectedness, a “withness,” which characterizes our very appearance in the world (the term “compearance” also having the juridical meaning of appearing before a judge). It seems to me that the one-day structure is particularly well suited to expressing the “compearance” that Schoene identifies as exemplified in *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*, and notable in its absence from *Arlington Park*.

It is surprising, then, that Schoene does not pay any particular attention to the fact that both the texts he discusses are one-day novels, though he notes that *Arlington Park* is like *Mrs Dalloway*, and indeed McEwan’s *Saturday*, in being a one-day novel “geared towards the hosting of a party.”³⁶ What more tangible and immediate, though never fixed or designed in advance, structure can be imagined than the shared hours of the day? The day is, surely, just such an existential link that, crucially, operates at the human scale upon which Nancy insists; compearance, he says, “consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us) What is exposed in compearance is . . . you *shares* [sic] *me*.”³⁷ There is no doubt that the day is always already there, and we will (both,

all) share it, be entwined in it, until the day we die. The chiming of the hours of Big Ben in *Mrs Dalloway* is perhaps a paradigmatic instance of novelistic representation of “compearance,” albeit filtered through institutional attempts to govern time; the car crash in *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* constitutes a temporary revelation of this compearance to the characters of the novel who, per Schoene, otherwise overlook its existence in their community. It is in large part precisely the single-day scale of these and other such novels that focuses our attention on the dailiness of our lives, the temporal structure that we all share.

Agency: What Can Be Done in a Day?

My second question raised by the one-day novel has to do with agency: what can be done in a day, and by whom? By this I do not just mean (though I also want to evoke) the practical sense, characteristic of much daily experience, that in any given day “there was something to be done before anything could be done.”³⁸ This quotation from Dorothy Richardson’s epic modernist bildungsroman *Pilgrimage* expresses the existential sense that life is a permanently unfinished project, as well as the specific demands of a day’s work. So I want to invoke the broader sense of the term “done” to ask what opportunities the one-day novel offers to explore the varying degrees of agency, particularly as concerns active capacity, productivity, or creativity, that might be offered to different subjects within a single day.

A useful place from which to start is the observation that few one-day novels have a day of employment as their temporal frame—what is “done” in the day of the one-day novel is rarely paid work. Indeed, even those texts whose primary focalizers are employed workers tend to describe a nonworking day. *Saturday*, focalized through an eminent brain surgeon, speaks for itself; the single-day frame of *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* is set on a specific Sunday (the day Diana, Princess of Wales was killed, in fact); Bloomsday, although a Thursday, involves little conventional working-week activity on the part of the primary characters. Perhaps most notably, Lanchester’s *Mr Phillips* follows its eponymous central character apparently setting off for work, but in fact meandering around London, having recently lost his job but disguising the fact from his family. One exception here is Glenn Patterson’s 1999 novel *The International*, which is narrated by a young bar worker and which describes the day before the inaugural meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. A partial exception is James Kelman’s *Mo Said She was Quirky* (2012), which describes a twenty-four hour time-

period, including the narrator's shift working at a casino, although the length of time she spends at work is not reflected in the proportionately much smaller amount of space it takes up in the text itself. But even *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Alan Sillitoe's groundbreaking 1958 narrative of the working man, signals in its very title the fact that it specifically covers a period outside hours of employment. In short, the one-day novel seems to go out of its way not to narrate the working day. In this, it is perhaps not distinct from the novel, or even literature, more generally in tending to eschew sustained description of working activity. But given that the single day has seven different days of the week to choose from, it is notable that five or six out of every seven one-day novels are not novels of the working day. From this one might draw the broad conclusion that one-day novels tend to resist the valorization of employed work. Collectively they seem to imply, by omission, that a valuable day in which things can be done is not, or not only, or not particularly, a day of paid employment.

Despite this apparent lack of interest in depicting paid work, it is nevertheless worth considering the legacy of the campaign for the eight-hour day for discussions of the one-day novel. Of course the eight-hour day movement was primarily concerned with making the working (employed) day more humane. But for the labor unions that drove these movements, the establishment of the eight-hour day was far from marking an end to their struggle. Rather, the political impetus behind their campaigns was largely informed by the Marxist aspiration to a society of nonalienated labour, and indeed a nonalienated life. Marx's ideal, expressed in *The German Ideology*, of a society in which an individual can "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic," is the model of life under a communism that has dispensed with the "fixation of social activity."³⁹ The campaign to establish the eight-hour day was, therefore, on a continuum with broader questions about how daily activity of various kinds is measured and/or valued, by whom, and for what purpose; and about the extent to which we are defined as individuals and as a society by the activities that make up our day-to-day existence.

These questions continue to animate novelists throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries and are particularly prominent in the novel of the single day, with its sustained attention to how the hours of the day are spent. For example, Cusk's *Arlington Park* provides an explicit corrective to various social and cultural assumptions about what a day involves and what can be done in it. This novel *is* set on a working day, and the first focalizer is Juliet, a teacher; the second chap-

ter (after an introductory third-person panoramic description of the town where the novel is set) describes Juliet waking up and preparing herself and her family for a weekday. But the narrative moves on to a different focalizer before we enter the gates of the school where she works. (We do step inside those gates at a later stage to see Juliet taking her afterschool literary club, the high point of her month—a pointedly extracurricular activity.) Indeed, some of the other focalizer characters (all female) are also employed, but none full-time, and again, on the day in question, we see none of them at paid work. Instead, these women are depicted engaging in domestic activities—shopping, cooking, caring for children, attempting to keep their houses clean and tidy—or avoiding doing these activities, which are nonetheless always presented as what has to be done that day.

The tasks these women undertake are difficult and emotionally demanding in particular ways. So, for example, when in the middle of a particularly fraught episode a character's young son is described as having "a gob of glittering mucus on his upper lip that stayed there for two weeks as the repellent testimony to his robustness,"⁴⁰ the challenge involved in the work of keeping one's children clean is bound up with the combative relationship between mother and son. Another character, Maisie Carrington, feels "entombed, unprotestingly, in the untidiness of the house: it was draped over her like a shroud with no openings for her arms and legs, so that when she walked around it or reached out to touch it she felt a kind of dragging following movement, and a sense of amputated numbness."⁴¹ Maisie's relationship with her untidy house is enormously freighted at an emotional level, because tidying the house is an activity that is expected of her and yet to which she does not feel equal. It is something that cannot be done. That is to say, Maisie feels personally unable to tidy the house, but what is more, housework can by definition never be done. Each task has to be done repeatedly, every day or nearly every day, and often begun again almost as soon as it has ended.

The way in which housework exemplifies the repetitive temporality of the everyday is particularly vividly expressed through Amanda, a character whose relationship with housework is very different from Maisie's but equally cathected: she needs to have "mastered the weekly disciplines of shopping and cooking, to have penetrated her husband, her children, her possessions with such sanitary force that their very natures seemed to recur, like laundry, in a transfigurative cycle of cleanliness."⁴² Crucially, this endless activity must be performed precisely in order to maintain the "stationary life" she lives in the most desirable street in Arlington Park. So while in wider society the working day—by which I mean the day in paid employment—is explicitly defined by what is "done" in that

day, and indeed mechanisms for measuring what is “done” are central to the functioning of advanced capitalism, *Arlington Park* observes that what can be done in the day of the stay-at-home mother (or the parent who is staying at home on that particular day) is much harder to articulate.

This observation is, of course, entirely consonant with familiar feminist critiques of the way in which women’s work has been and continues to be devalued or even rendered invisible. It also meshes with Felski’s feminist critique of the “disdain for repetition” that “fuels existentialism’s critique of the unthinking routines of everyday life, its insistence on the importance of creating oneself anew at each moment” (IEL 83). Felski argues, against the existentialists, that habit and repetition are themselves important identity-building practices, perhaps particularly where individuals have limited agency: “In the maelstrom of contemporary life, change is often imposed on individuals against their will; conversely, everyday rituals may help to safeguard a sense of personal autonomy and dignity, or to preserve the distinctive qualities of a threatened way of life” (IEL 84). Where individuals’ agency is limited, repetition and habit may in fact be a particularly significant way of affirming identity; the one-day novel’s capacity to focus on these habitual activities, repetitive actions, and to give them narrative space, makes it particularly apt to express the way in which these actions, while not necessarily positive or even transformative, are much more profoundly the loci of identity than the dramatic, disruptive event.

To conclude this section, I want to dwell for a moment on the distinction just evoked—one so common to discussion of the everyday that it is more or less a truism: that is, that the everyday is the antithesis of the “event.” By this I don’t mean what we might informally call “everyday events,” nor do I mean the term in what Sayeau calls the “narratological sense,”⁴³ that is, quite simply, something (anything) happening in a narrative. Instead I am evoking the existential understanding of the event proposed by thinkers such as Heidegger and Alain Badiou (and adopted by critics such as Sayeau); the event as something disclosing, transforming, or disrupting some fundamental sense of self, society, or politics, and crucially, as something not only unforeseen, but unforeseeable. Mark Currie, in his work on temporality in narrative, elaborates on the distinctions between various philosophical accounts of the event but notes that “unforeseeability is the key attribute of those philosophical conceptions”;⁴⁴ it is, per Badiou, “a structure that is divided between a present time in which the event is unpredictable, indiscernible and unnameable, and a future time, when it will have happened, from which it can be ‘ontologised’ and retroactively named as a part of the situation that it did not seem to belong to in the first place.”⁴⁵

There is, of course, a great deal to be said on the complex relationship between the event and the everyday in a literary context, and Sayeau's monograph on the topic is an excellent intervention in the field. To keep the focus on the specific form of the one-day novel, however, I want to propose a reversal of the summary of Badiou offered by Currie above. That is to say, might the one-day novel be an excellent means through which to explore the possibility of an "event" that does, in fact, appear to be "part of the situation" from which it appears, retroactively, to have emerged? Instead of reintegrating an event with the context within which it appears radically conflicted (which is the process Currie describes above), the one-day novel, with its limited time-frame, leaves open the possibility of an "event" being hidden within its pages, not activated within the few hours of its narrative scope but apt to be released at some later stage.

This possibility is made explicit through the dual narrative structure of *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*. Here, neither we nor the protagonist know at the time of her brief conversation with the boy at number eighteen that he will demonstrate exceptional heroism in trying to catch the child struck by the car. She will know by the end of the day; the reader, by the end of the novel. However, neither does she know that it will be the last time she speaks to him—something she, and we, only know some time later, after she has found out about his death; nor—most significantly in rendering this apparently neutral encounter "eventful" in her life—that at the time, he was in love with her. If, per the definitions of the event outlined above, what is eventful can only be identified as such after the event (as it were), then the extent to which it is regarded as eventful (meaning significant, challenging, etc) may only be revealed much later, and may change over time.⁴⁶ The one-day novel might, then, do at least two things in relation to the event: it might challenge the valorization of the event (described by Felski) by focusing on the eventlessness of much of daily life; and, by singling out one day, it might implicitly invite the reader to speculate on the event that may be hidden in any of the other days surrounding this one in particular. That is to say, we do not necessarily know what is "done" by the end of a day, by whom or to whom—even when something that might be called an "event" by any of the definitions invoked above occurs in it (such as a suicide, or a near-fatal car crash). What we can more readily identify is what is "done" in the comforting, tedious, repetitive, habitual activities of our days. If we want to identify where agency, and its cognates, capacity, development, and creativity, inhere, we are, I would argue, just as likely to find it in the everyday that forms the backdrop to supposedly primary "events"; the everyday to which the one-day novel can pay particular attention.

“What will have happened”

I want, finally, to return briefly to the specific issue of the representation of temporality in narrative, drawing on the alternative model of narrative temporality recently proposed by Currie. Currie argues that “the temporality of narrative . . . operates according to a tense structure quite different from the one we normally assume for it. This tense structure is the future perfect, the tense that refers to something that lies ahead and yet which is already complete, not what *will happen*, but what *will have happened*.”⁴⁷ Currie’s argument is largely informed by the paradoxical temporality of reading: in reading a narrative, we move forward in our own time while reading events that are presented as having already happened; and although these events lie in our reading future, they are not, as our real future is, inaccessible, since we can dip in and out of the pages ahead of us in a book. He argues that this model of narrative, as anticipatory retrospect, has the “potential to define distinctly contemporary temporal structures of the novel,” as well as being a characteristic of narrative in general.⁴⁸

Evidence for Currie’s argument can readily be found in *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*, a contemporary novel strikingly concerned with the temporal position of anticipatory retrospect. There are numerous instances within the text, from the boy at number eighteen who calls himself an “archaeologist of the present,”⁴⁹ taking polaroids of everything he sees around him and making artworks out of discarded syringes and broken car windows, to the old couple who, when newly married, repeatedly told each other the story of how they met “the way you’ll tell our children when they ask,” to a young woman’s wondering “whether you can feel nostalgic for something before it’s in the past.” Even more significantly for my purposes, where in the opening pages the protagonist reflects on “the day,” she observes that “it seems wrong that there wasn’t a buildup, a feeling in the air, a premonition or a warning or a clue”; the book opens and is governed by a sense of anticipating, or failing to anticipate, something that has in fact already happened.⁵⁰

The complex and paradoxical structure of temporality in narrative that Currie proposes comes clearly into sight here. The day, and its defining event, lies in the past of the protagonist’s existence, as she narrates it in the first-person sections of the novel from a temporal location some time later. But the narrative of the day itself is in the reader’s own future. So when the narrator says, “it seems wrong that there wasn’t . . . a warning or clue,” the effect of this is, of course, precisely to give the reader a warning or clue; it is spoken from a privileged position of anticipatory retrospect, where the narrator looks back on what has happened, re-

calling a point at which she did not yet know what would happen. To be sure, the narrative itself proceeds without giving any heavy-handed indications of what precisely is to happen; but the whole narrative of the day is now overlaid with this expectation that something profound is going to occur, and if the book is reread, this knowledge inevitably colors our reading of passages that might at the time have offered no particular buildup or premonition.

What we do know about any given day, however, is that it will have happened. It is this which makes Currie's model of narrative so apt to the study of the one-day novel. The day in question may not have happened to us, if it happens to be the day in which we die.⁵¹ And eventually it will not have happened at all, when the sun explodes and dies—or, arguably, before then, when there are no humans left to observe the sun setting and rising and to call it a day. But until then, and if, as Currie argues, “we think ahead by imagining looking back,” a key vantage point from which we can reliably look back on something that has happened is the end of the day, something that we can all easily imagine.⁵² “For,” as Chiara Briganti puts it, “if the shape of the day may be a microcosm of life, the assumption is also that in fact it isn't—a day will be followed by another day; one does not write the word ‘end’ at the end of the day.”⁵³

What insights, then, has this consideration of the one-day narrative offered? I hope to have made some inroads into exploring the paradox of the apparent conflict between the single day and the everyday, arguing that the one-day scale of the text draws our attention to the comparability of days with each other, and articulating the political aspect of this comparability by drawing on Nancy's concept of “compearance.” I have also suggested an alternative perspective on the familiar antagonism between the event and the everyday, by considering how the one-day novel inflects the philosophical model of the unforeseen event. The novel of the single day puts pressure on the question of what can be “done” in a day and by whom; indeed, this question is necessarily raised by this one-day structure. The one-day novel has, in principle and in practice, a particular capacity to reveal, attend to, and explore the apparently nonproductive or passive elements of everyday life and the capacity (or otherwise) for individuals to assert agency therein. So the narrative of the single day offers a model for a narrative that operates at a graspably human scale, and that prompts reflections on individual and collective agency. But there is also this paradoxical future orientation of the apparently bounded and closed single-day form. That is, insofar as the day ends without ending us, and is thus a place from which we can and often do look back, it also prompts consideration of what may lie ahead.

NOTES

- 1 Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3. Highmore identifies precisely this kind of challenge to conventional articulations of theory in Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007); see Highmore, "Something Ordinary," *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 1, no. 1 (2010): 4–6.
- 2 Rita Felski, "The Invention of Everyday Life," in *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Post-modern Culture* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2000), 81 (hereafter cited as IEL).
- 3 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1996), 340.
- 4 Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 18.
- 5 Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 375 (hereafter cited as *EL*).
- 6 For a useful summary of the historical factors involved here, see IEL 78–79.
- 7 Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007).
- 8 For an explicit discussion of this choice, see Lorraine Sim, *Virginia Woolf: The Patterns of Ordinary Experience* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 2. For a general discussion of her work's relationship with theories of the everyday, see Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 12–17. There has of course been work explicitly interrogating the notion of the everyday in relation to other literary periods. Notable contributions to the study of more recent literature and the everyday include Siobhan Phillips, *The Poetics of the Everyday: Creative Repetition in Modern American Verse* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009), and Neal Alexander, "Profoundly Ordinary: Jon McGregor and Everyday Life," *Contemporary Literature* 54, no. 4 (2013): 720–51. Laurie Langbauer's *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1999) evidently covers, though does not exclusively focus on, the modernist period.
- 9 Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 37.
- 10 I have identified only a very few pieces of published criticism that explicitly focus on the one-day form. These are David Leon Higdon, "A First Census of the Circadian or One-Day Novel," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 22, no. 1 (1992): 57–64; Robert Weninger, "Days of Our Lives: The One-Day Novel as Homage à Joyce," in *Bloomsday 100: Essays on Ulysses*, ed. Morris Beja and Anne Fogarty (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2009), 190–210; Chiara Briganti, "Giving the Mundane its Due: One (Fine) Day in the Life of the Everyday," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 39, no. 2–3 (2013): 161–80. There is also an essay in Finnish, Dietrich Assman, "Yhdenpäivänromaani: Mietteitä erään tutkimuksen perustaksi," in *'Siivilöity Aika' Ja Muita Kirjallisuustutkimuksia*, ed. Toimittanut Eino Maironiemi (Joensuu, Finland: Publications of the Univ. of Joensuu, Series A, No. 25, 1982), 5–22; I have not yet been able to procure an English translation of this article.
- 11 Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 1–11.
- 12 Weninger, "Days of Our Lives," 206, citing Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), 147. Similarly while Briganti makes some useful observations in opening about the particular features of the one-day form and its suitability to the narratives of female middle-age that she discusses, ultimately (and despite her title) her conclusions in this essay focus primarily on how these texts challenge high-/middle-/lowbrow taxonomies rather than on the temporality of these texts.
- 13 J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 188.

- 14 Sheringham also makes this point in slightly different terms, though like me he moves beyond it: "In some respects a particular day is the antithesis of the everyday: the *quotidien* ignores the difference the calendar marks, it belongs, indifferently, to the day after day, to repetition rather than difference" (EL 364).
- 15 Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (1992; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 15.
- 16 Higdon, "A First Census," 57. Higdon argues that the very first one-day novel is Victor Hugo's *Dernier jour d'un condamné* (1829), and only identifies nine written before 1900 (in any language).
- 17 Other such texts from recent decades include Graham Swift's *The Light of Day* (2003) and *Tomorrow* (2007), Glenn Patterson's *The International* (1999), James Kelman's *Mo Said She was Quirky* (2012), Nick Barlay's *Curry Lovebox* (1997), and the US novelist James Hynes's *Next* (2010)—though this list is not exhaustive.
- 18 Berthold Schoene, for example, claims that both Jon McGregor and Rachel Cusk are best described as neomodernist writers (Schoene, "Suburban Worlds: Rachel Cusk and Jon McGregor," in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009], 154–79; 161, 169). Both novelists were also cited by Monica Latham in her presentation on "Virginia Woolf's Neomodernist Heirs: Nostalgic Innovators" at the British Association for Modernist Studies international conference, Institute of English Studies, London, June 27, 2014; see also Latham's article on Cusk and Woolf: "Arlington Park: Variations on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*," *E-rea* 10, no. 2 (2013), <http://erea.revues.org/3216>, n.p.
- 19 Tom McCarthy, "To ignore the avant garde is akin to ignoring Darwin," interview by James Purdon, *The Guardian*, August 1, 2010.
- 20 Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, 209.
- 21 Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, 58.
- 22 Rachel Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1997), 117.
- 23 Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, 188.
- 24 James Hafley, *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 73.
- 25 Weningen, "Days of Our Lives," 192–93.
- 26 Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 199.
- 27 Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (1922; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 69.
- 28 Jonathan Gershuny, *Changing Times: Work and Leisure in Postindustrial Society* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 16.
- 29 Or, put another way, "it appears to be impossible not to submit the everyday sometimes to the infamy of insignificance and sometimes, in order to save it, to the hyper-significance of absorption into history, into the aesthetic, or even into the religious. In such an accession, the everyday loses its everydayness." Jean-Luc Nancy, *Philosophical Chronicles*, trans. Franson Manjali (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2008), 38–39.
- 30 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925; London: Penguin, 1992), 3–4.
- 31 Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 148–49.
- 32 Cusk, *Arlington Park* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 185–86.
- 33 I am indebted to Saikat Majumdar for this very helpful distinction, as set out at the opening of the roundtable he convened on "Narrating the Everyday: Ethical Risks and Rewards" at the Modernist Studies Association annual conference, University of Sussex, August 31, 2013.
- 34 Alexander, "Profoundly Ordinary," 729.
- 35 Schoene, "Suburban Worlds," 157.
- 36 Schoene, "Suburban Worlds," 161.

- 37 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1991), 29.
- 38 Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4 vols. (1915–67; London: Virago, 1979), 2:37–38.
- 39 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 53.
- 40 Cusk, *Arlington Park*, 119.
- 41 Cusk, *Arlington Park*, 185.
- 42 Cusk, *Arlington Park*, 56–57.
- 43 Sayeau, *Against the Evil*, 28.
- 44 Mark Currie, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2013), 5.
- 45 Currie, *The Unexpected*, 74.
- 46 Indeed, Sayeau argues that it is a particular characteristic of certain modernist or proto-modernist narratives to seek to displace the primacy of the event, both in literature and (by implication) in philosophy (*Against the Event*, 35–39).
- 47 Currie, *The Unexpected*, 1.
- 48 Currie, “The Expansion of Tense,” *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (2009): 356.
- 49 McGregor, *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), 153.
- 50 McGregor, *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*, 45, 31, 10.
- 51 Indeed, this is the kind of day depicted in Hynes’s *Next* and, less explicitly so, in Barlay’s *Curvy Lovebox*—that is to say, each novel ends with the protagonist’s death.
- 52 Currie, *The Unexpected*, 164.
- 53 Briganti, “Giving the Mundane its Due,” 162.