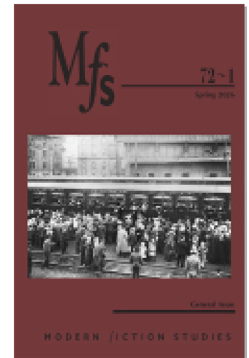
How Day Novels Work: Temporal Economy in *A Day Off* and *Party Going*



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How Day Novels Work: Temporal Economy in *A Day Off* and *Party Going*

Aidan Watson-Morris

Abstract: The single-day novel form enjoyed increasing prominence in the 1930s, shadowed by global crisis and economic collapse. Storm Jameson's *A Day Off* and Henry Green's *Party Going* stage everyday leisure as compensatory fantasy and ironic critique of capitalism, playing on what Theodor Adorno calls work's "rigorous bifurcation of life." This essay reads these novels in tandem to trace a parallel between modernist ideals of aesthetic autonomy and popular desires for free time. Labor reappears as the return of the repressed in these novels, illuminating the day novel's underacknowledged centrality to early twentieth-century literary history beyond the modernist paradigm.

The novel relating the microevents of a single day enjoyed increasing prominence as a modernist genre in the 1920s following the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922, only for this emergent form to collide with economic collapse in the next decade. The day novels of the 1930s registered and responded to the historical conditions of a global crisis by oscillating between a compensatory fantasy of free time and a critical depiction of the ironic role that leisure played within social reproduction under capitalism. Two novels by writers from radically different orientations—*A Day Off* by Storm Jameson, a committed so-

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cialist, and *Party Going* by Henry Green, an ambivalent aristocrat—play on the contradictions of work and leisure in everyday life. Worktime necessarily relies on the devaluation and commodification of its opposite; as Theodor Adorno put it, work's "rigorous bifurcation of life" (190) subjugates leisure time to the role of restoring the capacity for work, while capitalists sell the experience of relaxation as a product. As a result, free time offers no escape from the work relation, and "free time is nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour" (194). In *A Day Off* and *Party Going*, labor reappears as the return of the repressed, revealing social contradictions and artistic tendencies in the day novel form that illuminate its underacknowledged centrality to early-twentieth-century literary history.

Free Time

Of the many problems of the early twentieth century, leisure might appear among the least pressing. This seemingly marginal status might explain leisure's role in the modern era's most potent genre of fantasy literature: economics. In a brief 1930 essay, John Maynard Keynes famously predicted—with characteristic strategic optimism—that "the *economic problem* may be solved . . . within a hundred years" (366). The solution to the economic problem would open us to the "real" (367), "permanent problem," that is, "how to occupy the leisure" afterward. Leisure represents the limit problem of collective endeavor, and for Keynes, the fundamental problem that will emerge once we have the rest in hand. At the same time, as this much cited essay reminds us, the emergence of "the age of leisure" (368) performs as a powerfully effective, romantic fantasy. At the turn of the century, leisure occupied a double position as both existential problem and speculative ideal. Despite the hold this ideal has maintained on the popular imagination, the promised free time of the modernist era, as Adorno later argued, remains structurally foreclosed.

The Keynesian dream of leisure runs into a problem analogous to what Georg Lukács considers the constitutive problem of time that structures the novel form. The novelist, Lukács argues, works with vertiginous temporal freedom. For Lukács, the typical solution to the problem of the novel's "'bad' infinity" (*Theory of the Novel* 101) can be found in the nineteenth-century novel's recourse to biographical form. But the modern novel famously eschews normative narratives of development. Many novelists, in lieu of narrating a life, found an equally effective solution to limiting bad infinity: the form of the single day, a solution manifest most famously in *Ulysses* (1922) and

Mrs. Dalloway (1925). (Granted, such a form often proved synecdochic for a life, as in James Joyce's famous formulation: "Life is many days.")

The day novel arguably reached its peak popularity in the 1930s, as formal autonomy and economic constraint collided. As the form made popular by the novels of the 1920s moved into the 1930s, the day novel warped under the pressures of political-economic crises, continuing to exert force in shaping conceptions of everyday life. At the same time, contemporaneous critics such as Edmund Wilson and Lukács understood the formal shift to register a turn away from the social and historical conflicts of the time. But the day novel establishes and attempts to resolve the novel's formal problem of temporal autonomy—that is to say, free time. With the growing popularity of circadian novels, turn-of-the-century novels attended to the temporality of the form as a proxy site for social conflicts, including the contradiction between labor and leisure. The day of the day novel and the day of the working day frequently enter into a formal tension, as Bryony Randall observes: "few one-day novels have a day of employment as their temporal frame" (601). Work exerts pressures on the novel that we might call, inverting Lukács, bad finitude. The novelist has to bracket economic compulsion to restore the temporal elasticity that defines the form.

In a contemporary entry into the canon of day novels, Martin Riker's *The Guest Lecture* makes explicit the link between Keynes's curious understanding of time—his uncertainty about economic futures (the market's "animal spirits") as well as his prediction of utopian leisure—and the distinct temporality of the day novel as a form. Explicitly invoking the modern day-novel paradigm most conspicuously shaped by but predating *Ulysses* (as Elizabeth Covington and Steven G. Kellman note), Riker playfully inverts Joyce: "History is the nightmare from which I am trying to fall asleep" (131). In Riker's novel, an academic frets over the presentation she is to give the next day on the performative aspect of Keynes's rhetoric. Recently denied tenure, she suffers from paralyzing anxiety about the immediate future of the next day, in addition to compounding anxieties concerning the future of her life, her career, and her family. Her professional and personal dilemma prompts a dialogue with a ghostly Keynes who voices her theory of Keynes's tactical optimism. For Keynes, the psychological fluctuation of the market could be ameliorated with a certain affective management, a theory likely influenced by his prophetically apocalyptic *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919). That text saw in the Versailles Pact a guarantee of war and the crumbling of order on the continent, but if Keynes started

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his career as an apocalyptic prophet, he shifted to a mediating role with capital. Both Keynes's interest in the "time element" of political economy and his insistence on what we might call a speech-act theory of economics make him relevant to a strain of modern literature that probes the link between labor and leisure.

The specter of leisure haunts what Anson Rabinbach names the "'laborcentric' universe" (290) of modernity in which, as Riker's protagonist puts it, "leisure can be a kind of work" (33). Adorno put a finer point on this observation, as mentioned above, asserting that the "rigorous bifurcation of life" (190) makes of free time "nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour" (194). The Möbius-like dynamic of labor and leisure is the repressed other of the Keynesian fantasy, the economic unconscious of the "long 1930s" (Mellor and Salton-Cox 4). Keynesian fantasy itself, taken as an aesthetic object—a "fiction," in Hayden White's sense—might be emplotted as the repressed wish of a near-total political-economic crisis.

Crisis was the dominant note of the 1930s: "in the lives of most . . . the central economic experiences of the age were cataclysmic" (Hobsbawm 87). As unemployment soared and the value of money cratered, the New York Stock Exchange crash—in a world economy that had embedded, if not fully integrated, the US at its center, and which was producing in excess of demand, thus setting in train cascading effects that rippled across the world—"amounted to something very close to the collapse of the capitalist world economy" (91). 1930s day novels registered and responded to these historical conditions by oscillating between a compensatory fantasy of free time and a critical depiction of the ironic role played by leisure within social reproduction under capitalism.

I argue in this essay that the 1930s day novel mediated the contradictions of leisure as social time. Both Jameson's socialist variant of the day novel and Green's capitalist-pessimist iteration exemplify the tendency of the 1930s day novel to mediate the formal contradictions of capital in their representation of leisure. First, extending Covington's argument that *A Day Off* instantiates Jameson's "socialist critique" (267) of the modernist day novels of a decade prior, I read *A Day Off* as an ironic depiction of "free time" from the perspective of the working class. Then, shifting to Green's *Party Going*, set during the hours after the end of the working day, I argue that Green's engagement with class offers a complement and contrast to Jameson, depicting 1930s bourgeois leisure as purgatorial in nature. Jameson's *A Day Off* ironically portrays the time of unemployment as free time, reconfiguring high modernist technique to level a socialist critique;

Green's *Party Going* exemplifies the concerns of the era, figuring a fog-delayed train commute at a London station as an allegory for the purgatory of capital (from which, for the aristocrat-bourgeois Green, there is no exit). In each novel, if to different ends, the use of the day novel as a form stages an aporetic confrontation between free time and its opposite.

The Day Novel

When the day novel form ascended to the popularity it enjoyed in the 1920s and 1930s, time was out of joint. In 1884, the "universal day" (Barrows 40) had been established as a global law, placing England at the center of the imperial universe with a twenty-four-hour standard reifying a social structure for temporal reckoning as a "cosmic" (36) universal. What David Leon Higdon and Kellman term "circadian novels" constrict their narrative duration to a twenty-four-hour or shorter time span. While the day novel form preexists the literary history of the twentieth century, as Covington observes, literary historians have frequently construed the single day as an aesthetic "paradigm of temporality" (Rancière 48) coemergent with modernity. Higdon locates a diurnal, or circadian, novel as early as 1777 in Vivant Denon's *No Tomorrow*. But throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the constraint went largely unremarked, even when employed by figures as prominent as Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, or Lewis Carroll, or by those who furnished the modernists with a model, particularly Édouard Dujardin or Olive Schreiner. The tension between continuity and novelty marks the diurnal novel form, which, according to Kellman, recalls the unity of time in the classical Aristotelian conception—that is, a narrative that unfolds in real time. (Kellman suggests that in "the one-day novel, . . . reading time approaches fictional time" [216].) Even as this narrative constraint has a long history, it remained a marginal species of novelistic form until the modern era. As Higdon's partial archive indicates, only in the early twentieth century does the diurnal novel finally move from the margin closer to the center, from feature to form. "Before it could exist in numbers" (57), Higdon contends, "the circadian novel's creation had largely to wait for the time-obsessed twentieth century." After the 1920s set the modernist paradigm, however, political-economic collapse set the conditions by which a new formal tendency of the day novel emerged in the 1930s, just as the form gained momentum from the previous decade.

The day novel staged a confrontation between realism and modernism, categories in flux at the time, in ways that an overem-

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phasis on *Ulysses* has overshadowed. As Joe Cleary argues, the early-twentieth-century shakeup of the literary world-system reflected less a chasm between these two traditions than the critical formation and reification of realism and modernism as contradictory and polyvalent traditions. These traditions produced genuine effects on the trajectory of postwar literature, albeit a trajectory subtended by residual and emergent alternatives to the modernist dominant that, Cleary suggests, displaced the realist dominant stationed in London, Paris, and Moscow. Cleary revisits and dislodges these categories while simultaneously preserving them, helping to track the historical emergence of symptomatic modernism-vs-realism polemics during the Cold War. Global crisis, Cleary claims, conditioned modernism's "attempted sublation of realism" (261). After Joyce used the single day as a metonym for modernism's constitutive temporal obsessions, writers charged the day novel form with the task of sublation.

The day novel was a form particularly suited to this task given its dual association with backward-looking Victorian and Romantic traditions (exemplified by Dickens and Hugo, respectively) and with innovative avant-garde modernist experimentation (exemplified by Joyce and Virginia Woolf). Rather than being a compromise formation, however, the day novel tended to be wielded to claim modernity, even when its use tracked more clearly with traditional realist concerns (as in Mulk Raj Anand's 1935 *Untouchable*). The context of transatlantic interwar debates over the political utility of modernist or realist technique overdetermined the reception of 1930s day novels, obscuring the contradictions underwriting the form itself. As day novels from the period, *A Day Off* and *Party Going* enable us to extend Cleary's call for literary studies to both attend to and move beyond the histories of realism and modernism as performative aesthetic categories in the making. From different political and aesthetic vantage points, Jameson and Green each rework the modernist paradigm of the day novel by placing a contradiction immanent to the form in parallel with a contradiction heightened by capitalist crisis: the contradiction between capitalist temporality and temporal autonomy—between, that is, the global market's universal time and the day novel's free time.

A Day Off

The emergent tendency of the 1930s day novel manifests as a sustained focus on time off the clock. Jameson's *A Day Off* exemplifies this tendency by playing off the double meaning of "free time." The eponymous day off in Jameson's novel's title refers to a day of precari-

ous unemployment, not recreation. *A Day Off*'s unnamed protagonist spends her youth working in an industrial mill, work interrupted by a pregnancy out of marriage. Forced by her misogynistic cohort to flee the city and work at cafes, she embarks on a brief romance with a German worker, Ernst. But interwar tensions on the continent escalate and Ernst flees an increasingly hostile London. In the narrative present, the protagonist awaits word from George, a married man whom she has taken as a lover and patron. Broke and desperate, the possibility that he might not show haunts her thoughts.

The novel renders her perspective in an interior monologue that recalls Marcel Proust, Dorothy Richardson, Joyce, and Woolf, among others: "What shall you do if?—thoughts that began in this way terrified her. No, no, her mind cried. Not now, not yet. Think of something. I am thinking. Think" (215). Readers learn the novel's story in a temporally disarrayed sequence. Memories resurface, while dreams and fantasies play out in the protagonist's mind without clear demarcation. Within Jameson's corpus, *A Day Off* occupies a hinge point between her early interest in modernist aesthetics and her growing interest in social realism. In her posthumously published autobiography *Journey from the North*, Jameson describes *A Day Off* as both "perhaps the only genuinely imaginative book" (270) she wrote and a "failure." Around the time of its composition, Jameson came to reject both the "heresy of the 'pure' novel, in which form, composition, have the supreme importance" (286) and the "much talked-of 'proletarian novel,' that latest weakest version of the naturalist's 'slice of life'" (283), despite her ideological affinity with the latter. Born of these contradictions, *A Day Off* models a complex negotiation between literary forms and political commitments. Jameson inflects the newly ascendant paradigm of the circadian novel with questions of labor and social reproduction—questions of the historical moment that, Wilson and other critics initially supposed, this form sought to obscure.

At every moment, *A Day Off* plays with its modernist interlocutors, tweaking them to accommodate the "socialist critique of the day novel" (267) that Covington identifies in her perspicacious reading. Opening with the protagonist "settling into her body" (211) as she awakens from a "substantial dream" (210), she stares at an "oblong mark" (211) on the ceiling, a mark that launches her into a reverie of childhood memories. In a characteristically subjectivist confusion of past and present, the narrative shifts without clearly marked transitions between her present tense and her recollections of hiding from her mother, who asks: "Where *has* the child gone?" (210). This

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unmarked dialogue resonates through the various textual levels at play. In the analeptic scene of her memory, her mother cannot find her daughter. But the question also receives an answer in the diegetic present, locating the former child's destination in her adult life while evoking a mournful undercurrent paradoxically being lived at the very moment of its lament. Rising to the extratextual level, this passage poses a question answered by the following narrative, suggesting the obstinacy of the past as the protagonist encounters it.

Light fills the room, figured as liquid in excess of its container—"the June sun outside, filling the narrow street to the neck" (211)—a symbolic association that recurs and patterns the language of the novel throughout. The multitude of liquid light metaphors threatens to drown the text, mimicking the protagonist's sense of her past as a physical burden and an obstacle to perception. She finds "blinding, that light" (243) of the luminous reanimation of prior experience that continually shapes the story. The chain of associations among liquid, light, and memory vitally engages with the Bergson-refracted tradition of the novel transfigured by the flux of intrasubjective temporality.

The densely allusive aspects of *A Day Off* steer scholarly conversations dedicated to the novel, justifiably so. As Covington shows, Jameson reworks passages, reproduced verbatim, from *Mrs. Dalloway* into her text. Covington interprets the novel as a critique targeting a modernist ideal of bourgeois subjectivity tied to excess leisure time; in particular, the time of leisure enables the self-narration that ballasts the rich interiority associated with the bourgeois subject. Such an argument finds a precedent in foundational theoretical work on the English novel by Ian Watt and Nancy Armstrong, among others. For Covington, the modernist novel further colludes in the formation of the bourgeois subject through the rise of the day novel, implicitly affirming Wilson's age-old critique of the modern literary movement. While Clarissa Dalloway has time to reflect on and self-narrate her moments of being, the working-class protagonist of *A Day Off*, according to Covington, finds no respite in the recurring memories—however poetically presented—of industrial labor, service work, and destitution.

Whereas Covington draws a sharp break between Jameson's novel and its most obvious predecessors, Chiara Briganti situates *A Day Off* within a tradition tasked with a quasi-infinite representational extension. Briganti suggests that the novel recovers for its protagonist a "nameless tired shop-woman" (169) who makes a brief appearance in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Rather than critique, however, Briganti reads Jameson to further a defamiliarizing project in which Woolf

also participates. Though with different answers and from different orientations, Covington and Briganti each raise the question of Jameson's modernist affiliation or adaptation, a question that has largely informed scholarship on the text.

David James, for instance, splices these different ways of reading the novel together. James argues that the novel's use of montage and "geographical superimposition" (59) dissolves the categorical divisions between metropolitan modernism and regionalist writing that help ground, for instance, Wilson's account of modernist form. These readings, centered on the ideology of genre, train their focus on the novel's intertextual engagements with certain strains of modernism. I extend and revise such readings here by bringing to the surface the formal agonism between different temporalities in the day novel.

While the protagonist hopes to "break a day off from the rest" (275), *A Day Off*'s structuring montages of analepses and dreams, rarely distinguished from narrative events, repeatedly intercede in her attempts to recapture her own time from work. Readers willing to disentangle various narrative threads learn of her youth in a rural mill; her flight to the city following the betrayal of a lover along with the sexist scorn she endures in her hometown; her work at an inn; and her several-years-long relationship with Ernst, a German immigrant who finally leaves England due to rising anti-German sentiments. In the novel's present, she aims to relieve her anxiety about George and takes a daytrip to London where she naps in a park under a tree. Alienated from those around her, she frequently fantasizes about conversations that do not take place (rarely clarified as such to the reader) even as she proves unexpectedly hostile in the conversations that do take place. Through the fragmented dreams and thoughts pervading the narrative, she experiences her past "not as something remembered but as lived" (266), so that while her mind "describe[s] an arc not measured in space, . . . the part of her that went on while she slept was actually and only a child." As with the double resonance of the opening reference to her as a lost child, this passage suggests palimpsestic layers vividly preserving the scene within the protagonist's consciousness. The slippage among memory, dream, and narrative present is continually confronted by the problem of work, whether it be in the remembrance of labor, future projections of poverty, or the lack of money that discomfits the protagonist in the narrative present.

Of the many dreams interspersed throughout *A Day Off*, the most remarkable takes place while she naps under a tree. The narration highlights this dream as "perhaps . . . not a dream, in the sense that it recalled and summed up an experience she had lived through"

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(265). This narratorial aside calls its own narration into question, yet it also precedes one of the few dreams in the novel that could not possibly be an accurately presented memory. In this memory-dream, the protagonist witnesses a woman knocked down by a car:

> half dragged half lifted from the wheels her hat fell back showing smooth bands of hair. There were no marks on her. Thus far the day. In the dream, the hat falling off dragged off the long fair hair. The dreamer with horror saw a head like a large smooth pale egg lolling over the rescuer's arms. The victim was carried to her feet. There laid at the side of the pavement its clothes broke apart and the body shone through. But no longer the body of a girl, its folds and creases, the discoloured flesh, were dreadfully familiar. She knew before she looked at the face that it was her own . . . At once the pain of the wheels overcame her, the houses and shops menaced, the sky over Oxford Street thickened its colours, and she felt a moment's pure terror. Knowing that the ground was about to open and receive her, its weight pressing out blood, breath, and sense, but before death the agony of death, before nothing everything, before the end the whole. (266)

This passage models in microcosm the anachronic movements and palimpsestic layering of the novel itself. In an inexplicable reversal, the protagonist feels herself, and not the girl, struck by the vehicle. The anxious delineation between "the day" and "the dream" suggests a narrative logic paradoxically invested in distinguishing the realms of the real, the remembered, and the dreamt, even as they are interwoven. The narrator organizes the scene into a confluence of memory and dream, as well as their eventual detachment insofar as the dream spirals out into fantasy. The narrator voices their own uncertain, nervous interventions, revising the description of the dream into "not a dream" but something more chimerical, not quite a memory so much as a synthetic, phantom construct of embodied memory-data. Even as the narration differentiates between three modes of experience, the scene itself ultimately culminates in a confused unity: "before the end the whole." At the level of the syntax, "the whole" follows "the end" which it precedes, doubling the recursive logics of the narration so that the past follows the present in parallel to the dis-individuation staged by the dream itself. This dream further seeds a later scene, in which the injured woman of the dream anticipates an inebriated woman whom the protagonist takes advantage of. The protagonist cannot see the "impalpable connections joining her life" (301–02) to others. This doubled scene then suggests a hidden logic in the novel's apparently formless anachronic structure.

The confusion between different timelines in the novel suggests the effect wrought by work, as the narrative binds together work and time. As Søren Mau has recently argued with renewed vigor, capitalism functions through a particular "configuration of temporality" (135). Mau follows Marx in observing that "capitalists purchase labour power for a determinate amount of time" (209), effecting "the exchange of materialised expressions of abstract temporal units of human labour" which then "become[s] the mechanism through which social life is reproduced" (242). In this way, the reproduction of social life is organized around the reckoning of time by value. Value circulates in markets through the dizzying collapse of different time outlays—labor, transportation, and so on—into the abstract equations involved in commodity exchange. In effect, capital relies on "a sequence of empty, homogeneous blocks . . . completely detached from the rhythms of nature and human activity" (208). Under the competitive pressure of markets, "socially necessary labour time" (157) compels workers through impersonal mechanisms, while the commodity's store of "dead" or "congealed" labor time figures these abstractions as the rule of the past (dead labor) over the present (living labor). At the same time, the conditions of economic dependency compel workers to sell their labor-power and indebt their future to the capitalist market indefinitely, permanently leasing their life to capital. The routinization and domination of abstract time produce "*a temporal displacement in which the past appropriates the future in order to subjugate and neutralise the present*" (135). Put another way, the time of capital "is the existence of the past *in* the present."

Such a preservation of the past in the present, I claim, results in the temporal derangement that structures *A Day Off*. Beyond Covington's contention that the novel renders the "memory-destroying" (274) effects of labor, my reading instead centers on the enduring memories of labor that prevent the protagonist's apprehension of the present. The "constant throbbing of the looms" (*A Day Off* 242) that paced her early life reverberates within the protagonist as "every vibration of the machines repeated itself in her body." The past persists in the continued bodily damage of the present, the mill's "disintegrating assault" (243) on her "gift of complete response." The protagonist experiences the past "as though it were something hard, indestructible, behind the flimsy screen of grass and trees and blue sky" (241). Even on her supposed day off, the damage of work thus stays preserved in her memories and dreams, as "time doubling back on itself" (243) conditions her perception itself. In this, Jameson's novel resonates with what Nick Hubble locates in John Sommerfield's

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May Day (1936) from the same era: a reworking of "Woolfian techniques" (148) to demonstrate a "proletarian time" that expresses, at the same time, "people's desire for a different kind of time." Like Sommerfield's novel, which in Hubble's reading is equally interested in the relationship between modernist form and the depiction of proletariat political consciousness, the depiction of a temporality particular to labor conditions the depiction of subjectivity in *A Day Off.*

In addition to the past overburdening her capacity to perceive the present, the protagonist experiences her "not unguessable future" (*A Day Off* 305) as a shadow over the novel. Work reaches beyond working time to affect the experience of time itself, subjugating and neutralizing the possibility of free time or futurity. Since "events fast becoming memories" (301) are "dead shells sunk in the sand," no "events were as real to the woman as her thoughts" (220). Thus, while "her thoughts and her desires" (245) remain "muddied and confused by the thinking of other people," the temporal displacement of capitalist life confines the protagonist "until a moment enclosed all she felt" (275). A free moment—be it a day or simply a few hours—remains caught within what Adorno describes as the "rigorous bifurcation of life" (190). The day novel's rearrangement of narrative time cannot escape the pressures of this bifurcation. Under its pressure, time "split[s] across" (*A Day Off* 226).

Party Going

The buffer zone between time for labor and time for leisure in *A Day Off* narrows to the few hours after the workday during which *Party Going* takes place—"the end of a day for them, the beginning of a time for our party" (23). Characteristically frenetic, *Party Going* splits between two narrative tracks, both set in a London train station. A heavy fog indefinitely grounds the train at the station in the hours after the workday ends, with "no train due to leave after half past two, or two hours earlier" (15)—a frozen image of the past that parallels the stubborn past-in-present of *A Day Off.* Along one narrative track, a group of upper-class friends, all women save for the rakish host Max (who plays the women off each other in games of seduction), constitute the party departing for a vacation in France. They spend the novel waiting, manically flirting with and courting each other, and talking in Green's famously clipped dialogue in the privacy and luxury of the station hotel, safe on the upper floors though intermittently interrupted by the shouting masses of commuters who have been locked out of the overbooked hotel.

These commuters and their equally chaotic goings-on make up the novel's other track. The novel opens with May Fellowes—an older aunt of Claire's, one of the titular party—washing a dead pigeon after she witnesses the pigeon fatally fly into a structure within the station. In an odd ceremony, she takes the pigeon to the station bathroom to wash the corpse. After doing so, she falls ill. The ruckus as Claire rushes to get her medical care while her fellow passengers speed to the hotel enables another (lower-class) character to slip into the hotel, breaching the barrier between above and below. May spends most of the novel convalescing on a hotel bed, ignored by her fellow passengers (including her vocally conscience-stricken niece Claire) as she experiences apocalyptic visions in her delirium. These visions disturb the rhythm of the novel as it moves between the witty bacchanal above and the slapstick claustrophobia below.

The novel continually transfers between these two narrative tracks and tonal registers. A mythic tone sketches the station in Stygian imagery. May sees herself "on a shore wedged between two rocks" (46) beneath "a darker sky" with "clouds coming far away together into a darker mass" (46–7). The pigeon that launches her hallucinatory visions echoes the albatross of the Ancient Mariner. At the station, the scene with its would-be commuters and vacationers "sitting here till domesday" (18), "luggage round about in piles like an exaggerated grave yard" (23), recalls for party-member Julia "an enormous doctor's waiting room" (36), like it would be "when they were all dead and waiting at the gates." In this system of imagery, the station figures time outside of work as a purgatory. As the masses swell in anticipation of trains that won't come, the partygoers rush to a hotel that subsequently "put[s] up steel shutters" (38) to prevent other commuters (presumably working-class ones) from "ma[king] a rush [to the hotel] . . . to get something to eat." As the host of the party Max puts it, "it is only the rich who rule worlds" (55).

This gothic idiom alternates with the comedy of manners in the hotel, as cries from the crowd intermittently interrupt the party's frantic groupings and regroupings, reconfiguring romantic triads centering on Max. These events take the bathetic tone that Naomi Milthorpe terms the "dialogic banal" (103), a deflation of the novel's gothic register that accents instead the motifs of miscommunication, ambiguity, and "the uncertainty of everyday" (98) speech. The novel's myriad misheard or futile exchanges—in which "words were passing" (*Party Going* 13) but "no communication was possible" (51)—inflects the style of the prose. Referring to the same character by different names or pronouns while twisting the syntax into near opacity, this

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style requires readers to navigate the characters' confusion as they make their way to and through the station. The style in this way reproduces for the reader the feeling of an impasse or a repetition.

For example, we follow the character Julia on her way to the station, "as a path she was following turned this way and that round bushes and shrubs that hid from her what she would find she felt she would next come upon this fog dropped suddenly down to the ground, when she would be lost" (9). This sentence's contortions avoid attributing agency, anticipating the indefinite suspension awaiting Julia at the train station, while the stacking of subordinate clauses suggests a dense accumulation of language to rival the swelling of both fog and crowd: "Fog was down to ground level outside London, no cars could penetrate there so that if you had been seven thousand feet up and could have seen through you would have been amused at blocked main roads in solid lines and, on the pavements within two miles of this station, crawling worms on either side" (7–8). This quasi-cinematic pan outward to an abrupt impersonal scale dwarfs any individual, and Julia, "as she stepped out into this darkness" (8), "lost her name and was all at once anonymous." Class renders the masses in the station likewise anonymous, leading Nick Shepley to suggest that the character names deliberately blur identity further. This liquid relationship between "I" and "we" suggests the perverse, distorted mirror image of what Hubble calls the "proletariat answer to the modernist question" to which Jameson attempted a response; here Green provides a bourgeois, aristocratic answer in which the "we" threatens to dissolve the "I," slowing down the peripatetic, comic goings-on in the hotel and sinking them into the muck of the mass.

The novel then departs from the interpersonal relations of the novel form to portray a city immobilized, its people reduced to "crawling worms" (8). Thomas S. Davis notes how this characterization of London as a "suspended city" (8) functions through a microcosmic "scene of everyday life that lays bare the structure, function, and anxieties of an entire city" (10). In so doing, Davis reads Green's use of "daily life as a pressure point for class antagonisms and . . . war anxiety" (8). I follow Davis's dialectical reading of the novel's movement between scales but depart from his emplotment of *Party Going* into narratives of modernism as an inward turn and late modernism as an outward turn back to the social scene. Taking the day novel as a form through which social problems can be articulated, *A Day Off* and *Party Going* stage the suspension of temporality as a problem of labor and class. Both are critical of the effects of labor: the former from a perspective of political solidarity and the latter from a vantage

of disinterested horror. In its stylistic rendering of stasis, *Party Going* mirrors a social structure similarly stuck, ground to a wormlike crawl.

As "fog burdened with night began to roll into this station . . . beginning to fray tempers" (*Party Going* 127), the spatial division between the upper class—sealed in the security of the hotel's upper floors and far removed from the crowds massed outside in the station—and the working commuters, chanting for trains, intensifies. The commuters "were like ruins in the wet, places that is where life has been, palaces, abbeys, cathedrals, throne rooms, pantries, cast aside and tumbled down with no immediate life and with what used to be in them lost" (128). Here labor is connected, as in *A Day Off*, to a holding pattern that keeps those at the bottom of the class system in the past. By contrast, the interactions of the partygoers offer the alternative of a similarly petrified existence, distinct only in their relative comfort and in the energy expended to sustain denial. The chants of the crowd, which repeat verbatim at different points in the novel, allegorize the recurrence of crises that affect the working class and leave the upper class largely untouched. But the novel, as Shepley argues, defuses crisis, and ultimately underscores the everydayness, the banality (per Milthorpe), of crisis itself. As the chants grow louder, the "party-going" (23) is "revealed for what it is: a means of evasion," according to Sheila Liming. Indeed, the growing cries from the "thousands below" (*Party Going* 96) are, to Julia, "sheep with golden tenor voices" who "happily [sing] their troubles away." Julia misinterprets "what they sang in Welsh," which refers to "the rape of a Druid's silly daughter." The sudden eruption of horrific sexual violence and Julia's ignorant muting of it—a missed encounter between above and below—models in miniature the novel's larger pattern of formal shifts. The novel's movement between gothic grotesque and comic banal shows how the supposed modernist inward turn and the supposed return to social realism belong to the same era—the era that Lauren Berlant aptly terms the "crisis ordinary" (9), or capitalism as usual.

Party Going enacts this crisis ordinariness through the periodic interruptions of crowd noise, in which a "continuous murmur" (*Party Going* 61) rises to "a continual dull roar" (111–12). The crowd's yells often repeat verbatim—"a huge wild roar" (131); "WE WANT TRAINS" (62)—while those thronging the station seem, to the anonymous observers in the hotel, "dimmed into anxious Roman numerals" (112). Crisis ordinariness recurs here at the level of the text. As Mau argues, crisis plays a key role in reproducing and reasserting capitalist relations as ordinary. At the end of *Party Going*, as the belated trains

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finally depart, the exhausted crowd will still need to show up to work the next day (and the partygoers will not). As the crowd disperses, "separated there they became people again" (159). Julia thinks of the "dear good English people . . . who never make trouble no matter how bad it is." Crisis is then merely a feature of ordinary, everyday life. *Party Going* casts a single day as a metonym for an economic system, anticipating Berlant's concept of crisis ordinary as the reproduction of capitalist inequality by way of the many related processes of daily life. For partygoers and peons alike in Green's novel, crisis may seem to destabilize the capitalist ordinary but in fact further entrenches it.

Party Going joins its crisis-ordinary narrative track to what Adorno would call the party's "pseudo-activity" (194). The party-goers' frenetic nonevents compensate for the fact that they remain—if more comfortably than those below—stuck in waiting for an indefinitely deferred leisure-to-come. The forms of time that shape capitalist life devalue and commodify the so-called free time that *Party Going* subjects to this thoroughly ironic treatment. In this regard, Green, perhaps surprisingly, anticipates Adorno's argument that work's temporal "bifurcation" subjugates time off the clock to the role of reproducing worker energy and commodified leisure. Commodity exchange remains the dominant, organizing logic, so that free time offers no escape from the work relation and instead becomes, again, "nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour" (Adorno 194). As the site of pseudo-activity—when not the site of crises or the site of gendered, unwaged labor—free time presents a problem for the day novel, which often eschews or elliptically brackets explicit depictions of routine work. *Party Going* stages the elliptical tendency conspicuously and foregrounds the formal tensions that attend the modernist day novel form, which necessarily confronts capital's "radical reconceptualization of the relation between work and time" (Crary 62). Ironically it is the form of the day novel, once made to bear the burden of modernism's political waywardness, that enables both *Party Going* and *A Day Off* to criticize the forms of temporality through which capitalism reproduces itself.

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