
The Narrative of the Everyday: Routine and Work in Contemporary Popular Fiction

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Abstract

Contemporary popular fiction has increasingly centred its narratives within mundane workspaces such as bookstores, cafés and small shops showcasing routine and ordinary labour over dramatic eventfulness. This paper examines *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop* by Satoshi Yagisawa and similar contemporary novels to argue that these texts exemplify a broader narrative turn toward the everyday, an everyday where meaning is generated through repetition and continuity rather than transformation. Contemporary novels like *The Kamogawa Food Detectives*, *Welcome to the Hyunam Dong Bookshop*, *We'll Prescribe You a Cat*, *The Healing Season of Pottery*, *The Convenience Store by the Sea* or *The Full Moon Coffee Shop* depart from the dominant plot-driven models that focus primarily on crisis, these novels relocate narrative significance within spaces defined by slowness and persistence.

The study employs close textual analysis informed by theories of everyday life, particularly those articulated by Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Raymond Williams, to examine how routine and mundane practices like reading unsold books, straightening shelves, serving customers, opening and closing shops function as primary narrative agents. The analysis demonstrates that these mundane actions are not empty rituals "symbolic gestures" done for show. They function as value-driven choices that actively hold life together and make survival feel possible and human. The paper finds that ordinary labour is not romanticized instead it is a condition of survival and coexistence. It refuses narrative climax definitive resolution, the texts showcase an alternative narrative ethics of endurance rather than progress. This shift has broader implications for understanding contemporary fiction's response to late-capitalist fatigue suggesting that the persistence of the everyday itself has become a central site of literary value and cultural meaning.

Keywords : Everyday life, mundane workspaces, spatiality, routine, narrative ethics, contemporary popular fiction, endurance; temporality.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is necessary for this study because the narrative strategies of routine, repetition, ordinary labour, and non-eventfulness remain under-theorized within dominant models of literary analysis that gives more importance to plot and transformation. Conventional narratological approaches tend to interpret stasis as lack or failure therefore offering limited tools for analyzing texts in which meaning is produced through continuity rather than change. This study adopts theories of everyday life as its primary analytical lens of how mundane workspaces function as narrative, ethical and affective structures in contemporary popular fiction.

The framework is anchored in three complementary theoretical models of that of Henri Lefebvre's theory of everyday life, Michel de Certeau's account of everyday practices, and Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling. Together, these approaches offer an understanding of the everyday as lived experience and cultural expression. Lefebvre's work provides the foundational premise that the everyday that is often dismissed or insignificant is in fact the primary site through which social life is sustained. It is where the ideology is reproduced. Repetition and routine are the conditions that make continuity possible. Applied to fiction, this perspective allows routine labour and mundane spaces to be read as structurally meaningful rather than merely descriptive.

De Certeau's theory of everyday practices extends this framework further by shifting attention from structures to actions. He conceptualizes ordinary activities such as reading, tidying, browsing or cooking as forms of inhabitation through which individuals negotiate existing constraints without overturning them. They don't aim at revolution but at autonomous initiatives within the grid of socio-economic constraints. Everyday life thus becomes a site of subtle agency and creativity. This model is particularly relevant to the present study as the protagonists' engagements with their workplaces do not constitute resistance or escape but modes of making life livable within given limits.

Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling provides the historical and cultural dimension of the framework. Williams defines structures of feeling as shared and lived affective orientations that emerge before they are fully articulated in ideology or in form. This concept allows the study to situate these novels within a broader contemporary mood characterized by fatigue and precarity. The recurrence of mundane workspaces across popular fiction is thus understood as an expression of a collective cultural sensibility.

These theories are combined because they operate at different but interconnected levels: Lefebvre addresses the structural significance of the everyday, de Certeau focuses on lived practices within those structures and Williams situates both within a broader cultural moment. Their integration enables a comprehensive analysis of how ordinary workspaces can function simultaneously as narrative engines and affective environments.

Methodologically, the framework is a qualitative textual analysis giving a close reading of routine actions, spatial repetition and unresolved endings.

Introduction

At a moment when much of the contemporary life is organized around acceleration and visible achievement, an increasing number of popular novels choose to their setting as instead as places where very little seems to happen. Second-hand bookstores, small-town cafés, neighborhood bakeries and failing shops have emerged as central narrative sites in recent fiction. In these novels, stories structured by routine and repetition. These narratives invite readers to spend time in spaces that are defined by maintenance rather than momentum. The ordinary does not function as a background but as a primary mode through which contemporary life is imagined and endured.

This turn toward mundane setting matters because it marks a significant reconfiguration of narrative value. Literary works frequently uses narrative fragmentation or psychological turmoil to generate meaning. While in popular genres, work or labor often appears as a barrier to personal happiness romance or adventure. By contrast, recent middlebrow and popular novels increasingly situate their protagonists within settings that neither promise advancement nor demand escape.

This paper addresses this gap by approaching mundane workspaces as active narrative structures that reorganize how meaning is produced. Drawing on theories of everyday life associated with Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Raymond Williams, the study argues that contemporary novels set in ordinary places exemplify a narrative logic set in endurance rather than transformation. These theories offer conceptual tools for understanding how repetition and ordinary practices sustain life under conditions in which dramatic change is neither possible nor desirable. Yet despite their relevance, everyday-life frameworks have rarely been brought into prominence with popular and middlebrow fiction, particularly in relation to work and routine.

Focusing primarily on *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop* by Satoshi Yagisawa and *The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore* by Laurie Gilmore, this study examines how mundane labour reading unsold books, straightening shelves, serving food, opening and closing shops functions as the primary narrative motor. The central research questions guiding the analysis are: How do these novels shift the main source of meaning in the story from dramatic events to everyday routines? How do ordinary, everyday spaces act as frameworks that determine which kinds of lives can be meaningfully told in these stories? How do these novels reflect a current cultural mood that values stability and staying the same more than moving forward or making progress?

By addressing these questions the paper makes three main contributions to literary studies. It develops a new way of seeing the everyday as a core narrative technique and not

just background detail or theme. It shows how popular and middlebrow fiction are important places to explore modern ideas about how stories handle moral and meaningful choices. It provides fresh language and tools to explain why stories focused on ordinary work, repetition, and routine feel so powerful and appealing today both culturally and artistically.

Mundane Spaces in Contemporary fiction

Every now and then, quiet workplaces take center stage in books like *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop* and *The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore*, shaping both plot and moral tone. Lately, this kind of setting has surfaced often in new fiction from Japan and Korea, along with stories labeled soothing or restorative that travel widely. Think used-book shops, neighborhood coffee corners, local wash houses, tiny diners - places where people do everyday jobs. Though these spots might seem ordinary, their predictability becomes a foundation for storytelling. Instead of sudden change driving events forward, it's persistence, attention to others, and daily rhythm that shape what happens. Because of this setup, emotional depth grows slowly, built into actions rather than speeches.

Within such narratives, work often becomes a quiet space where feelings go not to be fixed but carried quietly through repeated tasks. Take the *Kamogawa Food Detectives*, a tale built around a modest eatery bringing back lost recipes. Though it wears the shape of an investigation, its rhythm lies more in doing: stirring pots, chewing slowly, recalling fragments. Here, healing does not strike like lightning; instead, it seeps in during moments shaped by habit and shared tastes. Resolution fades behind consistency. What matters grows not from answers, but from showing up again and again. Now consider how *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop* highlights small routines within a local bookstore, focusing on shelf organization, book suggestions, because these acts shape its atmosphere. People arrive carrying weariness and doubt; still, answers do not emerge here instead, there is a steady pattern permitting days to unfold gently. Though problems remain unsolved, presence matters more than resolution.

This story pattern appears just as clearly in routine jobs outside literature. Healing shows up differently in *We'll Prescribe You a Cat* - not fixed, but lived alongside. Instead of dramatic fixes, treatment means doing small things again and again: offering food, wiping surfaces, occupying rooms together. A similar pace marks *The Healing Season of Pottery*, set among wheels and kilns. There, pressing wet clay and scrubbing brushes brings movement without goals. Results take time; sometimes they go unnoticed altogether. What matters grows during effort, not after it.

Spaces like *The Convenience Store by the Sea* show how repetition shapes daily life. Because shifts follow a fixed rhythm, stacking items on shelves and speaking with visitors becomes automatic over time. What matters most here is consistency; work goes on even when energy runs low. Stories set in places such as *The Full Moon Coffee Shop* or *Marigold Mind Laundry* still center on steady habits, though magic appears now and then. While ideas

may drift toward fantasy, actions stay familiar - pouring coffee, cleaning garments, hearing personal stories - the unusual slipping quietly into everyday duties instead of changing them. These instances, taken together, show how common workplace settings point to a collective moral stance instead of an isolated pattern. In each case, routine tasks and steady caregiving serve as ways characters face weariness, instability, and emotional stillness. Significance arises not by breaking free from daily life, yet by staying within its boundaries. Such widespread recurrence suggests the works analyzed here belong to a wider literary movement where upkeep, persistence, and sustainable existence stand at the core of storytelling.

Waiting Stillness Non Eventful Time

A noticeable trend throughout these works involves stillness and delay as key parts of storytelling. In both *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop* and *The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore*, time unfolds without focus on what might come next, instead, attention stays fixed on slow stretches where almost nothing shifts. Rather than serving as brief gaps between actions, pauses become ongoing states influencing how people see who they are and where they stand. Such focus on quiet duration clearly moves away from plots built on tension, haste, or constant progression.

Waiting shapes how time feels within the story of *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop*. Inside the small store, Takako remains through empty afternoons, surrounded by volumes that seldom find buyers. Silence fills the air. Hours drift forward without hurry. Interruptions do not come. The book does not rush past these pauses, instead it settles into them. Details pile up quietly: dust on shelves, light shifting across the floor. Time stretches because attention stays fixed. Stillness becomes part of what is said. Moments pass slowly since nothing forces them onward. Takako rarely understands her own sense of wait, yet the narrative offers no definite reason behind it. Though unmoored from purpose, this pause shapes how moments are lived - quietly, without pressure. Time stretches not toward something but simply exists, shaped by stillness rather than need.

When the shop shuts, time seems to pause. During these pauses, Takako rests deeply, letting hours slip by without tasks or interaction. Not portrayed as idleness, her stillness appears instead as a physical reaction, worn down by fatigue and feeling too much. What could be judged as unproductive becomes something else, an instinctive retreat. Open hours invite healing more quietly than expected. When moments stretch without demand, rest slips in, not through effort, but presence. Stillness stops running away; it starts holding. At the *Cinnamon Bun Bookstore*, time moves without drama, steady in its lack of change. Not like Takako's stretches of stillness, yet Hazel's routine carries a similar weight, each day shaped by what comes again and again. Shifts stack one after another, faces repeat their lines, steps follow worn paths among shelves. When something shifts slightly a note tucked inside a novel, someone new lingering near the counter. the moment settles instead of sparking motion. These small ripples fade into the usual flow, making little difference. Life continues much as before, unbothered by would be turning points.

What stands out in both books is how little push there is to move past waiting. Characters face no consequences for staying put, nor do they gain anything by holding on. No big moment arrives to make the wait feel worth it. By denying such rewards, the stories question the idea that waiting matters only if it brings about some later outcome. Living in suspension becomes, within these pages, an acceptable way simply to be. Theoretically speaking, this structure lines up closely with routines found in daily existence. Rather than highlighting dramatic shifts, Lefebvre sees ordinary time as built on recurring cycles. Progress takes a back seat; instead, the narrative energy goes into preserving what already exists. Through de Certeau's lens, small acts gain meaning waiting transforms into a deliberate rhythm. Far from being inert, such moments show subtle forms of adjustment. What looks like stillness turns out to involve quiet recalibration.

Meanwhile, the narratives add subtle layers to how waiting is shown. Rest does not become a virtue here. The urge in Takako to drift into endless sleep points toward where pause might slip into escape. Now and then, Hazel notices time moving even when nothing marks it, this brings out a low hum of discomfort under daily patterns. Such instances prevent us from seeing delay simply as healing. Stillness appears, then, as something that feeds but also unsettles.

Stillness shapes storytelling in ways often overlooked. Through stretched moments where little happens, these books mirror daily life marked by uncertainty and exhaustion. Time slows, refusing quick fixes or clear outcomes. Meaning emerges quietly, built not around action but within gaps between actions. What appears empty gains weight, turning pauses into substance. Narrative depth grows from what does not occur. In this slowness, readers meet a different kind of significance, one found in delay.

Routine and Repair in Days at the Morisaki Bookshop

Routine shapes nearly every page of Yagisaka's *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop*, where meaning builds quietly across lingering glances, repeated tasks, little movements done without fanfare, action takes a back seat. After suffering a deep personal hurt, Takako moves into the space upstairs from her uncle's used bookshop in Tokyo's Jinbōchō area. Here, escape means not striving forward, but settling inward. Little by little, she becomes part of the store's pulse: wiping down rows of old spines, noticing regular visitors, losing herself in forgotten titles, sitting still when business slows. Far from leading somewhere else, these moments form the core, not stepping stones, just being.

A quiet lingers where profit fades, this bookstore fits what Henri Lefebvre might call leftover space, barely surviving at society's edges, slightly behind time. Not output defines it, rather its refusal to vanish. For Takako, healing skips drama instead, slow routine wears down resistance. Insight often comes not in motion but pause: when doors stay shut, when streets remain empty. During those times, silence fills shelves and hours stretch thin. She later recalls one blank span after another, saying only that closed signs meant bed stays

lasting from dawn until dark. Lying in bed, one hour blending into the next, she thought of how nice it would be if sleep just never ended. Not an illness exactly, more like what the body chooses when worn down too far. Hours do not pass so much as gather, thick and slow, in corners of the room. Her being there, still, asks nothing from anyone.

What unfolds shapes how the story moves forward. Often, silence fills the shop while Takako remains inside - not rushing, simply present, pausing between moments that do not demand her response. By Lefebvre's thinking, such stillness reveals daily life bare of drama, minutes stretch on, though little shifts. Crucially, the book does not see emptiness as flaw. Rather, lingering turns into a way of being, holding her uncertainty without pushing toward clarity.

Reading moves through the familiar rhythm of daily life. Though not aimed at sharpening judgment or deepening understanding, Takako opens books just because they exist stacked, untouched, growing older like she is. These printed rows offer no grand change instead, they mark hours passing by. So reading becomes routine, not spectacle a way to handle what's already close at hand, something thinkers such as Michel de Certeau might call making quiet use of whatever lies nearby. Takako turns pages not because she seeks stories, yet simply to fill quiet stretches between customers. What matters is less the words on paper, more how rhythm builds through repetition each afternoon folding into the next. The habit holds her steady, even when attention drifts toward dust motes near the counter. Time passes differently inside these routines, shaped by turning corners at the same hour each day.

The shutting of the shop feeds into an ongoing pattern. Not a finish line, nor a milestone just one more turn in a loop set to restart at dawn. What looks like an ending functions differently it enables return. Each night's close exists only to permit tomorrow's opening. This rhythm undercuts dramatic peaks, favoring persistence instead. Time moves in circles here, not arcs. Stillness finds her slowly, not in moments of clarity or conflict, but by lingering in daily routines. What holds Takako isn't progress, rather the quiet pull of routine. From shelves and silence, she learns presence how to remain where she is.

The Everyday as Quiet Shift at The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore

Within the familiar patterns of small-town love stories, The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore gives quiet moments unusual weight. Fifteen years pass with Hazel Kelly behind the same register, day after day shaped by repetition the unchanged countertop, repeated gestures, rhythms of the place humming beneath everything. Where older tales paint stillness as failure waiting to be fixed, here it holds dual roles: boundary and shelter. Not an obstacle she flees, but rather the fabric shaping how Hazel moves through her world.

Early on, attachment to habit takes shape via small acts done without thought. A lone book out of place catches Hazel's eye immediately her attention locks onto it. In the Romance aisle, one tilted spine pulls her focus. What follows feels automatic adjusting it becomes

inevitable. That brief urge to act unlike herself fades fast when routine steps in. Instead of breaking pattern, she corrects it. The act lacks drama; there is no weight given to control or defiance. It just belongs to who she is. Her response mirrors how people live within spaces quietly. Not by claiming them, nor reshaping them, but tending to them. Care shows up in repetition, not declaration. Deviations pause maintenance resumes. Presence speaks through subtle upkeep, never announcement. The bookstore holds her not through title or change, but touch.

The shop keeps going, despite small tweaks to its name and look, staying much the same at its core. Because it repeats familiar patterns, not bold changes, its character holds steady. Introducing cinnamon buns brings a new element, yet meals quietly slip into daily rhythms without disrupting them. Scenes with food appear again and again - blueberries recalled, milkshakes shared, pastries eaten - though none shift the story's direction. Thickening now takes priority over moving ahead. Here, sensation builds slowly repeated, familiar tying the story more tightly to persistence than peaks.

What stands out is how Hazel's restlessness isn't fueled by loss or injustice, yet grows from sensing time slip past without clear turning points. Failure plays no role her path is defined by staying, not falling short. This condition the story does not frame as sorrowful. Rather, it offers something subtler quiet shifts, slight bends in habit that never break rhythm but quietly shift direction. Reading pulls Hazel closer to routine instead of breaking from it meals stretch longer, walks drift without aim, moments hang suspended. What feels like escape turns out to be attention paid slowly to what already exists.

Still, The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore doesn't pit habit against thrill. Much like Days at the Morisaki Bookshop, it implies significance isn't found by fleeing ordinary workplaces. Instead, such places allow subtle shifts without full disruption. Life continues unchanged on the surface, yet feels slightly easier to carry. Though familiar, each day bends just enough.

Endings That Don't Resolve and Choosing to Keep Going

A noticeable trend in the main works - and similar fiction lies in their intentional avoidance of neat endings. Instead of wrapping up with clear change, freedom, or answers, they close by emphasizing ongoing existence. Final scenes avoid finality, implying daily life simply carries on, altered little if at all. Such form echoes the moral stance woven through each story, where lasting becomes more meaningful than succeeding.

Ending the story, Takako stays within the bookshop's quiet walls, without sudden healing or bold new directions. Though subtle shifts touch her inner world, her outer circumstances show little movement. Still, shelves hold dusty titles, business hums along quietly, familiar rhythms keep turning. This absence of change slips into view not as defeat, but as something else entirely unspoken, accepted. Life goes on, just slightly different beneath the surface. Survival, in this frame, becomes its own quiet triumph. Not swept up by

drama, Takako stays rooted in the everyday. Meaning emerges simply through endurance. Outcomes shift when presence matters more than change. What remains is not grand just lived.

Still, *The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore* sidesteps tidy love-story endings even as it borrows from them. Though Hazel begins to step slightly beyond her usual patterns, reaching out now and then, nothing fundamentally shifts around her. Staying put in the shop, she holds back from chasing new goals or sudden transformations. Life settles again into familiar rhythms adjusted lightly, not shattered. By choosing quiet persistence over big change, the story stays true to its focus on endurance instead of reinvention.

Throughout the broader set of texts mentioned before, a similar rhythm appears. Inside *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop*, people move through the setting, entering and exiting without clear answers to what weighs on them. While *The Kamogawa Food Detectives* untangles specific memories, deeper feelings remain unresolved. At times, *Marigold Mind Laundry* and *The Full Moon Coffee Shop* bring brief emotional insight though such instances lead neither to lasting shifts nor fixed outcomes. Rather than becoming different people, individuals carry on with small internal adjustments, resuming familiar habits.

A refusal to close things off emerges not by chance, yet rooted in moral reasoning. Where older story forms insist on conclusions showing pain led somewhere meaningful a different approach takes shape here. Instead of completion, the focus shifts toward lingering uncertainty. These books challenge the expectation that struggle earns growth simply because it occurred. Closure gets sidestepped, leaving perseverance untransformed by victory. A sense of unresolved daily life fits Raymond Williams's idea of structures of feeling, where real moments spill beyond neat conclusions. Shaped by doubt and narrow futures, these loose closures suggest ongoingness instead of forward movement.

Crucially, such conclusions sidestep total emptiness. Lack of closure doesn't mean hopelessness or stillness takes hold. Rather, they hint that daily existence might continue even when certainty is missing. Lives portrayed stay small, limited, repeating still, never become impossible. What readers find fulfilling emerges not from finality, but from seeing routine endure without breaking down.

Endings that lack closure appear naturally within stories focused on ordinary experiences. Because conclusions emphasize ongoing routines instead of dramatic shifts, the books support an idea that significance exists without personal growth. Such patterns respond clearly to the study's aims, showing modern novels measure storytelling achievement differently less through evolution, more through persistence.

Conclusion

This project began by questioning common assumptions about what counts as meaningful in stories specifically, how stillness, daily rhythms, and unremarkable labor often get dismissed as background noise. Through close reading of *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop* and *The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore* with reference to related recent fiction - it becomes clear that quiet workplaces shape both plot and moral direction more than typically acknowledged. Instead of relying on drama or change, these narratives find depth in persistence they shift attention toward doing the same things, again, without fanfare. With support from writings on ordinary experience, the discussion reveals how such novels mirror present-day struggles marked by fatigue and instability, reframing slowness not as lack but as form.

Throughout the study, a number of central observations came into view. Rather than building momentum through conflict, many narratives gained motion from repeated actions, steady rhythms appearing in place of dramatic turns. Such patterns echo Lefebvre's idea daily life often centers on continuation instead of change, showing how sameness holds stories together without needing advancement. Next, moments of waiting and uneventful duration challenged common views of story timing; pauses were not empty gaps, but active parts of experience. Stillness took shape not as absence, yet as presence shaped by context. In these instances, fiction reflects de Certeau's argument - common acts like pausing, turning pages, or tending routines become subtle forms of agency within limits. A closer look showed everyday workplaces often act like moral systems, emphasizing attention, being there, physical upkeep more than results echoing Williams's idea of shared emotional currents while updating it for today's reality where getting through matters more than thriving. In the end, the deliberate lack of neat endings in these works supported a value system rooted in going on, disrupting the belief that significance comes only when tales finish with change or clear answers.

What makes this research stand out is how it treats the ordinary not as background detail, but as a structural force in storytelling. Through linking theories of daily life with mainstream and mid-level literary forms, the argument shifts focus toward seeing such works as key spaces where changing realities of labor, rhythm, time, and desire are processed. Another shift happens in ethical analysis: staying put, holding on, keeping going emerge here as meaningful artistic choices, not just plot devices.

Beyond abstract ideas, these results touch real-world habits and shared beliefs. At a time when money worries grow, exhaustion spreads, and chances to move ahead fade, stories focused on everyday jobs gain appeal pointing to a quiet hunger for meaning unlinked from standing out. Instead of chasing breakthroughs, such books affirm routines built on small efforts, steady tasks, showing how persistence itself can matter. They challenge common views that tie dignity strictly to output, expansion, or reinvention. Worth emerges not through change, but in staying.

A look at just one set of recent fiction means broader applications remain unclear. While this analysis centers on particular books, its ideas may hold elsewhere perhaps in movies, TV shows, or online stories. Questions emerge when thinking beyond literature: do these patterns show up in visual storytelling? Shifts by region might reveal how economic instability influences storytelling differently. What happens when place changes but struggles stay similar? Exploring diverse voices could expose hidden links between identity and labor norms. Different countries' writers might frame daily survival in distinct ways. One novel's quiet office moment may echo globally - but only some versions get told.

What emerges, then, is an understanding: the everyday carries weight. Far from passive or silent, it pulses within fictional worlds through acts like sweeping floors or keeping time. By lingering on what slips past notice the repeated gesture, the unremarkable street - stories uncover resistance woven into repetition. Staying open counts as choice; showing up matters. Meaning accumulates slowly, not in climaxes but in returns. Life persists precisely where little seems to happen.

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