



## One Day of Life

*Manlio Argueta , Bill Brow (Translator)*

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Awesome for the authenticity of its vernacular style and the incandescence of its lyricism, *One Day of Life* depicts a typical day in the life of a peasant family caught up in the terror and corruption of civil war in El Salvador.

5:30 A.M. in Chalate, a small rural town: Lupe, the grandmother of the Guardado family and the central figure of the novel, is up and about doing her chores. By 5:00 P.M. the plot of the novel has been resolved, with the Civil Guard's search for and interrogation of Lupe's young granddaughter, Adolfinia. Told entirely from the perspective of the resilient women of the Guardado family, *One Day of Life* is not only a disturbing and inspiring evocation of the harsh realities of peasant life in El Salvador after fifty years of military exploitation; it is also a mercilessly accurate dramatization of the relationship of the peasants to both the state and the church.

Translated from the Spanish by Bill Brow

## One Day of Life Details

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## From Reader Review One Day of Life for online ebook

### Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

Seriously folks ; this was in every Used Bookshop there for a while. Absolutely everywhere. So of course I took no interest in it. Then I picked up a free copy and looked at the gr=data :: 428 Ratings · 57 Reviews. Lesson not necessarily learned given that it's probably not a very good novel. We'll see.

We did see and it's not a bad novel(la) at all. You can read it in an afternoon. A topical piece about the kinds of violence our policy makers supported back in the '80s, this one set in El Salvador. It's pretty brutal. But what you read is a Rising Up. And a crushing down. And no kidding, it's the kind of stuff RURD is simply built for. As topical, those of a certain political stripe will call it propaganda, which it is, but propaganda for the good guys. Aesthetically, the prose is more or less that of the illiterate uneducated peasants who variously narrate the novel ; the passing of the 'I' from one character to another provides for adequate structural interest. Even if you see it absolutely everywhere, don't hesitate to pick up a copy. You know, *tolle, lege*.

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### Gisele says

Antes de leer este libro era raro que leyera algo escrito por los autores de mi tierra y es algo de lo que profundamente me lamento. Un día en la vida es el vivo retrato de la vida de una mujer en los tiempos de guerra en El Salvador. Cuando la injusticia por parte del gobierno estaba a la orden del día. Donde los ricos se enriquecían más y más a costa de los pobres y donde el estado ignoraba la sed de justicia por parte de las víctimas. Es un relato que te abre los ojos. Donde te das cuenta de la cruda realidad que se vivía en esos tiempos.

"Nos quieren meter a punta de machete y balazos la resignación de nuestras miserias"

Aunque nací en el tiempo de los acuerdos de paz, mis abuelos, mis tíos, mis padres quienes la experimentaron, quienes la vivieron, la recuerdan como uno de los peores tiempos que se vivió el país. Muchos huyeron, muchos fueron masacrados, muchos fueron maltratados, asesinados e ignorados por un sistema de justicia que se suponía tenía que defenderlos. Inclusive hoy en día todavía existe la repercusión de esos sucesos en la vida diaria de cada uno de nosotros. La violencia está a la orden del día originada de una sociedad y un estado fallido desde los primeros comienzos de los acuerdos.

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### David says

From the unassailable heights of the MORAL HIGH GROUND, the author manipulates the reader from the very first sentence. Though I have no doubt that atrocities were committed in El Salvador, it seems entirely probable that this happened on both sides, a complication that this book never even contemplates. I despise this kind of agitprop masquerading as literature, wherein the reader is manipulated to feel badly for not having the appropriate reaction to the author's button-pushing.

If you enjoy being played like a cheap violin, this shameless exercise in emotional manipulation may be for you. If you ask for a little more in your reading, then give it a miss.

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### **Michelle Lemaster says**

Through a fictionalized account, this book chronicles the social activism of the poor in Central America. A true call to arms. Beautifully told. Horrific in its depictions of a real life wartorn country.

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### **Karlo Mikhail says**

El Salvador in the 1980s. Written in the simple and direct language of the ordinary people, this powerful novel describes one day in the life of a peasant family that is at once oppressed by the US-sponsored military dictatorship and ready to resist these very forces that have kept them in the dark.

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### **Bryan says**

Written in 1980, *One Day of Life* takes place sometime in the mid-70s in El Salvador, and details the unrest of the rural communities which preceded that country's civil war. The book's primary voice, Guadalupe Guardado, speaks about her day, beginning in the predawn, and continuing throughout the day. At first there is a sense of being alive, but as the day goes on, more and more of the injustice and horror that she experiences is revealed.

Interspersed between the description of Lupe's day are accounts from various other personalities, including Lupe's granddaughter, her grown daughter, an unnamed police officer trained by the U.S., and other voices which add background to the events that Lupe experiences. Together, the two strains of narrative combine to highlight the tragedy of this family--and, by extension, the rural population of El Salvador.

Judged purely on its literary merits, I found the book slow going for about the first 3/4s of it. A reader more attuned to the history of El Salvador, or someone familiar with the politics of the time might not have this problem--in some ways, for me, it was like trying to catch a moving train. But aside from that, the introductory chapters with their attention to the peasant way of life were not very eventful. This starts to change toward the end of the book, and it's an unfortunate fact that what makes the story more gripping is the tragedy that was no doubt true in a general sense if not the particular.

A few years ago, I read a very similar book, published only a year after this one, called *El Infierno*, by Carlos Martinez Moreno, which dealt with the struggles between the government of Uruguay and the Tupamaro guerrillas. While *One Day of Life* did try to personalize the tragedy by placing the character of Lupe foremost as a kind of center around which to build the narrative, both novels rely heavily on vignettes to communicate the events, vignettes which seem to be the anonymous voices of survivors who just want someone to hear their story. The fractured style of these novels, with their disrupted timelines, their disembodied voices, and their atrocities, may actually be the best way to intimate the confusion and sorrow of the time, regardless of literary merit. It may be a bit difficult for someone not entirely familiar with the history to catch on at first, but they are certainly effective at communicating the tragedy of that time.

## **Fabian says**

The stories of horror plus the very acceptable way in which they are told... It is realism truly too real to escape or ignore.

The title in English "One day of life" refers/alludes to one day very different, supposedly, from your (the reader's) own. This translation evokes that Otherness. Even the title is mistranslated! However, the legitimate and extremely 100% correct way of translating the book in Spanish, "One Day in the Life" properly places the tale as an everyman parable. But in this instance in El Salvador. & in this instance not men but womenfolk. Though its not too hard to see parallels between these miseries and our own, dictatorship now not an act of fiction.

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## **Héctor says**

A moving novel based on the events that took place during 1 day in the life of a peasant salvadoran woman; it depicts the human tragic story of salvadoran or rather Central American life in the 1980's. a must read for every Latin American or anyone interested in feeling and sharing the pain of our sad history in Latin America. I just read somewhere that this book was placed 5th among the most recognized books written in Spanish in this century. Well done Manlio!

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## **Daniel Klawitter says**

"Kindness should not be confused with submission."

I first read this book over 20 years ago, and in 1992 spent a couple weeks in El Salvador right as the FMLN had negotiated a cease-fire with the government.

Re-reading the book now, in 2014, brought back many memories of meeting campesinos in the countryside and seeing the affection of the people everywhere for the assassinated Archbishop Romero.

This is a wonderful novel filled with poetic prose and the author captures the dignity and humanity of peasants caught in a violent situation of poverty and State-sponsored violence.

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## **Daniel Polansky says**

12 hours in the lives of a brutalized peasant family during the civil war in El Salvador. It's always a dangerous thing for an educated person to write from an uneducated person's perspective, it's a very fine line to hit, and I'm not 100% certain I felt Argueta did it here. There's a bit of a whip lash in the heroine's internal monologue from earthy, personal concerns to too-precise summations of the political circumstances afflicting her and her family. I appreciated this more frankly for the moral weight than its actual aesthetic. Which isn't to say it's bad, really, it's just not spectacular. This is why it makes no sense to write reviews about books, because at the end mostly you're just like, yeah, this was fine, there are better books and worse

books.

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## Giuseppe says

This book with its lyrical, raw, angry and jubilant writing style follows the extended family and community of an El Salvadorian town which has been repressed by the state and helped by the church during El Salvador's brutal civil war, made famous by figures such as Archbishop Romero.

In the story the peasants of El Salvador have organized into the National Federation of Christian Cooperatives (F.N.C.C.) and in doing so they have become regularly terrorized by the Salvadorian National Guard who proudly wear their "shit colored" uniforms of disgrace. Though the story took place close to 25 years ago the situation surrounding it has not changed drastically; state sanctioned terror in El Salvador has not ceased, we in the northern "America" merely hear about it less. Throughout the novel, which takes place over a single day, the tone changes from tranquil, to agitated, and gently into simple flashes of jubilation, jumping to celebration, to action and finally to hope with triumph in the face of dangerous and murderous adversity: The State of El Salvador. The family discusses their love for each other, folk superstition, their knowledge of human rights as they are written in the El Salvadorian Constitution (which they had no concept of previously) and their need to fight for what they now know, their relationship to "God", the church and the importance its' role plays in their lives.

This novel's narrative transcends the adversity to deliver a message of hope and celebration, despite the brutal climate they find themselves in. (A Priest is beaten to within an inch of his life, sodomized with a stick, and left for dead at the side of a road by the Salvadorian National Guard.) I enjoyed it thoroughly. I read it in less than a week lazily loafing about as I house sat. **I would suggest this book to anyone who believes in the freedom and inherent worth of the human spirit.**

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## Pam Giarrizzo says

First published in 1980, *One Day of Life*, by Manlio Argueta, details the brutal repression of working people in El Salvador, which led to the country's civil war. The book is told from many points of view, but mainly it follows the life of Lupe Guardado, a grandmother whose family members are at risk because of their opposition to the authoritarian regime and the rich landowners who seek to exploit them.

Lupe's son has already been murdered by security forces, and her husband has been hiding out in the hills, along with many other men from the town. Now the authorities want to question Lupe's teenage granddaughter, who was part of a group that occupied the local cathedral to protest the slaughter of those who had fought back against the murder of Lupe's son. Archbishop Óscar Romero, who we know from history was later assassinated by security forces, gives the group permission to stay in the cathedral for several days, then arranges for them to be safely evacuated by the Red Cross.

The role of the Catholic church in the repression of the townspeople comes into play throughout the book. Salvadoran peasants had been told by the priests for as long as they could remember that it was their lot in life to work hard for the landowners and be obedient to the authorities. They were promised that they would be rewarded in heaven. But new priests began to appear who wanted to help make their lives better in the here and now, and they encouraged the people to stand up for themselves and fight for their rights. Those priests were considered a threat to the people in power, and they suffered accordingly.

In addition to hearing the point of view of the working people, a couple of chapters in the book are written from the viewpoint of the members of the security forces, who grew up among the townspeople but ended up taking a different path. They look down on their fellow Salvadorans, convinced that they are Communists and that they will ruin the country if they are allowed to organize for a better life.

One Day of Life was a difficult book to read, as the torture and murder described by the author is unrelenting. By the end, though, I felt great admiration for the brave people of El Salvador, who were willing to fight for their human rights against such seemingly insurmountable odds.

<https://thebooktrekker.blogspot.com/2...>

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### **Linda Abhors the New GR Design says**

A simple story, a simple style. Poignant and charming, even though the events recounted are harrowing. In spite of them, there are moments of humor, just as there is in real life. A short read, books like this are books that people in this country might try reading, to "walk a mile in the other's shoes".

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### **Tracybrown says**

By far this is one of my favorite books of all time. The story describes one day in the life of a Central American woman who has to endure the hardships of life in poverty. Reading history of Central America this book captures many historical moments through the eyes of someone living through it.

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### **Biblibio says**

I was not expecting to like this as much as I did. *One Day of Life* is not the sort of political piece I was expecting, but that's not to say it isn't deeply political. Argueta tells his story almost exclusively from the point of view of poor, largely uneducated women, touching on a lot of issues of racial discrimination (poor Indians versus foreigners), as well as the way in which war uniquely hurts women (rape and violence featuring not insignificantly). The politics are constantly present, but the ideologies take second stage to the more human side-effects of violent, militant authorities. It tells a powerful tale.

The writing shifts tone according to the POV (which weaves around one primary narrative), going from a simple sort of poetry to a rougher style. I found that unlike many novels, these shifts actually helped carry the story without getting too bogged down in one specific slice of life. Rather than eliminating the emotional connection to Lupe's main story, the other angles seemed to enhance it.

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