

Conquering the studio-space. The emergence of women writers' self-representations within their studio in modern Japanese literature.

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Abstract

In the Meiji period the *shosai* 書齋 (studio) was a predominantly male gendered space, mainly set up in the upper-class houses of writers and intellectuals. Used for reading, writing or limited social interactions, the studio was a private room that ensured privacy and quietness. Given the importance of the studio and its association with the identity and creativity of his owner, many male modern authors chose to portray themselves as writers in their private and intimate workplaces.

On the contrary a scrutiny of women's writing of the same period shows the lack of women writer's self-representation in their studio in fictional or autobiographical works. However, despite the disparagement of women writers by Meiji society, the growth of women's literacy in the following decades and the emergence of newspapers targeting female readers contributed to empower women writers' voice. Thus, in the second decade of the twelfth century, women started to argue that wives and female writers too should have a space of their own within the domestic milieu.

Focusing on Miyamoto Yuriko's autobiographical writings describing her studio and Fumiko Hayashi's *Seikatsu* 生活 ('Lifestyle', 1935), this paper discusses how the emergence of literary self-representations of modern women writers within their workplace promoted the image of women as professional writers and made the studio a less male gendered space.

1 Introduction

Aficionados of literature from all over the world often make pilgrimages to the studios of beloved writers. In studios or house museums people look for the physical traces of their favourite authors and a more direct contact with them through the objects (books, desks, stationery) that belonged to them. In the case of Japan, as Kawana¹ recalls, the houses of many Tokyo writers have not survived the passage of time, which is why today the destination of what she calls 'literary ambulation' (*hodoku*) is often a literary museum space. A studio (*shosai* 書齋) may sometimes be reconstructed (e.g., Natsume Sōseki

¹ KAWANA 2018: 153–187.

Memorial Museum), displaying items that have survived natural disasters, wartime devastation and city reconstructions.

However, it is not only the physical studio that attracts the reader, but also its literary description and the account of the creation process within it, as proven effectively by the anthology *Shosai no uchū* 書齋の宇宙 ('The Universe of the Studio'), published by Takahashi Terutsugu in 2013. In the afterword, the author explains the motivation and purpose of his collection as follows.

As I am originally an editor, I have always been secretly interested in the creative process of authors, specifically in which environment (desk or studio), and what kind of writing paper and stationery they use to write. When I had meetings with authors, I often met them outside at coffee shops or university offices, and even if I occasionally visited them at home, it was usually in the living room, and I was rarely allowed to go through to their study. In a sense, the studio is a sanctuary for authors, and a hidden, secret space for editors and readers. The frustration of wanting to know, but not being able to easily find out, may have been the motivation for starting to collect the essays and other writings included in this book [...]. There have already been various magazine specials and books with colour photographs and descriptions of the desks and bookshelves of current writers and critics, which are enjoyable and satisfy the intellectual tastes of readers. This book differs from these in that it is an anthology that uses only printed text to vividly evoke images of the studio space and its objects, thanks to the authors' skilful writing and rich expressive power. In addition, many of the works were written by literary figures from the Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa periods, which gives the book historical breadth and depth, and a sense of nostalgia.²

Takahashi's anthology offers a selection of authors made according to his very personal taste. However, precisely because the author intended it to be of interest from a literary history perspective too, it is interesting to note that of the 59 authors mentioned, only twelve are women.³ One wonders whether, beyond the author's preferences, there are deeper reasons that explain this disparity in the number of texts on *shosai* written by women. Moreover, as the texts of the female authors included in the collection were published between the late 1950s and the 2000s, curiosity arises as to whether other women writers have talked before about their studio. I therefore believe it is worth investigating the relationship between modern women writers and the studio, examining

² TAKAHASHI 2013: 295–298.

³ Tsuboi Sakae (1899–1967), Amino Kiku (1900–1978), Kōno Taeko (1926–2015), Tsumura Setsuko (*1928), Sugimoto Sonoko (1925–2017), Tōdō Shizuko (*1949), Uchidate Makiko (*1948), Kishimoto Yōko (*1961), Saimon Fumi (*1957), Ogawa Yōko (*1962), Yamamoto Fumio (1962–2021), Miyao Tomiko (1926–2014).

when and how it became one of the subjects of intimate writing, and one of the spaces of authorial self-representation in modern Japanese women's literature.

From a general perspective, this article builds on studies by Anglo-American scholars who have adopted a feminist approach to literary criticism since the 1990s, renewing a focus on the female tradition in modern Japanese literature. It therefore takes into account studies that located women writers within the literary and sociocultural context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan (Fujimura-Fanselow 2011; Schalow and Walker 1996; Suzuki 2010), and those works that, in introducing several modern women writers to English readers, analysed how they were perceived by society and what kind of female characters they represented (Copeland 2000; Copeland and Ortobasi 2006; Lippit and Selden 1991; Mizuta and Selden 2015). Furthermore, since it deals with space and its literary representation in modern women's literature, the article fits into the broader discourse on the relationship between women's status and spatial arrangements (Spain 1993) and on the treatment of space in texts written by and about women (Wolff 1990; Reus Gómez and Usandizaga 2008).

Assuming that studio space, like any other physical space, is shaped by social reality, I will show how the actual use and literary representations of the studio (*shosai*) in late nineteenth-century Japanese literature reflected the prevailing unequal distribution of roles and rights between women and men, and the reduced access to the literary world and literary careers for women. The fact that *shosai* was clearly understood as a male space in female writing as well will be exemplified by quoting four fictional works written by prominent female authors of the time: Wakamatsu Shizuko (1864–1896), Tazawa Ibune (1874–1896), Shimizu Shikin (1868–1933) and Tamura Toshiko (1889–1945). I will then examine the attempts of some women writers to claim a room of their own and to challenge the general idea that the studio was a male gendered place.

In order to examine Japanese women's attempts to appropriate a space from which they were generally excluded, I drew on Inoue's valuable study of domestic architecture in pre-war Tokyo. Inoue explains how in the 1920s and 1930s various organizations and individuals challenged the traditional division of domestic space and promoted a new style of housing where certain rooms "that had previously been gendered male, such as the room for receiving guests, became negotiable and available for use by women also".⁴ Inoue also briefly discusses the issue of the studio, pointing out, as we shall see later, that in the pages of the magazine *Jūtaku* 住宅 ('Housing') edited by the *Jūtaku kairyō kai* ('Housing Reform Association'),⁵ some women began to claim for themselves the space

⁴ INOUE 2003: 79.

⁵ This association brought together intellectuals and professionals who promoted the improvement of domestic architecture. Many members were women who criticized traditional Japanese housing because it was no longer able to meet the needs of modern housewives and working women.

which was generally considered to belong only to their husbands. As an example of a domestic space reflecting a more equal relationship within the couple, she cites the case of Hayashi Fumiko's home: in her dwelling in Ochiai district both the writer and her husband had a studio.⁶

However, given the focus of her article on domestic architecture, understandably Inoue does not consider the literary repercussions of these claims, whereas my specific interest is to investigate how the *shosai* begins to emerge also in women's writing of the period. In particular, in certain self-representational narratives of Miyamoto Yuriko and Hayashi Fumiko we find the description of a studio within which the two authors can retreat to write, or simply spend some time alone free from domestic duties.

2 The *shosai* as a male gendered room

In the Meiji period (1868–1912) the word *shosai* was currently used to indicate the studio: a room usually equipped with a desk, personalized stationery, a collection of books and a bookshelf to store them.⁷ It was mainly set up in upper-class houses and reflected the new eclectic trends of domestic architecture that integrated Japanese and Western features. The studio, situated immediately off the main entrance hall, was usually a Western style-room where the head of the family could receive guests in private, conduct business or

Jūtaku's co-founder Misumi Suzuko graduated from the Women's Normal College in 1892 and was active in proposing innovations in women's education and introducing Taylorism into kitchen design (SAND 2003: 168). The first issue of the magazine appeared in 1916 and was well received by the public. In the 1910s it was the only popular publication dealing with architecture. The magazine took American publications such as *House and Garden* as a model, but differed from them in the reforming spirit of the articles. "The editors were not so much responding to a broad change in the housing market as seeking to instigate such a change themselves" (SAND 2003: 170).

⁶ INOUE 2003: 94–96.

⁷ The architect Ōkuma Yoshikuni (1877–1952) effectively sums up the history of this space as follows. In the Muromachi era, the lodgings of the prelates of the Zen Buddhist temple had a small room called *shoin* for conversation, reading or studying the sutras, effectively a forerunner of the *shosai*. Although the *shoin* was initially the prerogative of the monastic order, over time it began to appear in the residences of the military aristocracy, where it was mainly used as a room for receiving guests. From the end of the 16th century, the fundamental characteristics of the *shoin* influenced a style of residential architecture known as *shoin zukuri*. In the Meiji era, the studio, often furnished in the western style, was a room in the dwellings of the upper class and, although it was frequently used by the head of the household as a guest sitting room, Ōkuma claimed its original nature as a place to read, write and rest: in the tranquillity and serenity of this space, one could find solace and comfort, reflect in silence and improve oneself spiritually. Thus, he believed that it was not very different from the environment in which Zen meditation is practised (ŌKUMA 1921: 182–90). The association between *shosai* and Zen also appears in the story of the founder of the Rinzai school, Hakuin (1685–1768), recounted by Okamoto Kanoko (1889–1939) in her *Hōei funka* ('Hōei Eruption', 1940). Here the writer uses the term *shosai* for the studio of one of Hakuin's masters, Baō, at the Zuiun temple in Mino (in today's Gifu prefecture).

study.⁸ Since the organization of roles and activities shaped domestic space and reflected socioeconomic differences between men and women, the kitchen was considered a female-gendered room, while the studio was a masculine place. Here the husband could enjoy time on his own, keeping the door closed to avoid intrusions of other family members.

If the head of the household was an intellectual, a critic or a writer then the studio was mainly used as a workplace and sometimes called by evocative names such as *sanbō* 山房, 'mountain retreat'.⁹ Sobriquets like this were probably inspired by a long-standing tradition, both in literature and iconography, that runs throughout the pre-modern and classical Japanese literature and dates back to the Song dynasty (960–1279) in China, when the literati studio became both an object of visual and literary representation and a medium through which the literatus could represent himself.¹⁰ Specifically used for reading, writing and creating art, the studio provided to Chinese literati a space for personal practices, self-cultivation and selected social interactions. In Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's *Shanghai yūki* 上海游記 ('Shanghai Travelogue', 1921), for example, there is interesting evidence of this ongoing tradition in early 20th century China. While in Shanghai, Akutagawa was appointed to interview a number of major Chinese figures in order to collect some information on the current state of the country. In his travelogue he recalls his meeting with the philologist Zhang Binglin (1869–1936) at the latter's studio: a freezing cold room filled with books and decorated with a large stuffed crocodile hanging on the wall. This weird detail that attracted Akutagawa's curiosity tells us something about the eccentric character of Zhang himself.

For Meiji Japan's male writers, the studio is often the only space where they can feel at ease and their uncertainties and vulnerabilities can be minimized. While they played a crucial role in the first decades of Meiji era, they were later marginalized by repressive government policy and the modernization effort. The emphasis on the utilitarian aspects of life rather than aesthetic and spiritual values isolated writers and intellectuals from society. Thus, as Lippit writes, they

created a small, closed world of their own, a studio, where they could carry out artistic experiments and live according to their ideas, unhampered by the old conventions and utilitarian concerns. Although they suffered from their isolation

⁸ NISHIKAWA/YOKOKAWA 1995: 3–36; INOUE 2003: 89–90.

⁹ For instance, the sobriquet of Natsume Sōseki's (1868–1912) studio, *Sōseki sanbō*, was metonymically used by his disciples and friends to indicate the house he rented in Tōkyō's Waseda-Minamichō district.

¹⁰ ZHANG 2017.

from society, it enabled them to pursue and adopt the most radical and avant-garde ideas in the world.¹¹

Given the importance of the studio as an emblematic display of a writer's self-identity and creativity, it is not surprising that many modern Japanese novelists chose to represent themselves as writers in their private and intimate workplaces. The most noteworthy example is probably Natsume Sōseki's *shōhin* 小品 production. Despite the variety of styles, subjects and moods, a common feature of this semi-autobiographical bulk of writings is the presence of an ironic and self-deprecatory narrator in his studio cluttered with books, papers, pens and pencils, brushes and inkstones. We see him at work, pressed to meet a deadline, interrupted by inopportune visits, reflecting upon whatever comes to his mind or trying to warm up over a brazier on a winter day. The studio, which Sōseki often calls *garan* 伽藍 (Buddhist temple), is a sacred space. A kind of private enclave within his home, in which the narrator, like his author, can retreat and spend his days in solitude while intent on writing novels.¹² Sōseki's literary persona is the prototype of the twentieth-century artist: a solitary man, fully absorbed in his thoughts, who enjoys reading and writing above anything else. Since fiction seems preferable to reality and literature to existence, everything that is outside the four walls of his studio has a secondary value and the *shosai* becomes the physical correlative of his interiority.¹³ Also, in more pragmatic terms, the presence of a dedicated writing space attests his successful career as novelist who makes a living from his writing. Furthermore, because of the privacy it ensures, the studio in Meiji novels is often the setting where significant events within the life of a male character take place. This is what happens, for instance, in Tayama Katai's *Futon* (*The Quilt*, 1907) where the novelist protagonist, Tokio, falls in love with Yoshiko, his young female pupil, while reading Turgenev in his studio.

Literary conventions, fictional and autobiographical works, popular male authors' interviews and photographs of writers at their desk in literary magazines contributed significantly to strengthen the image of the studio as a male-gendered space throughout the Meiji era. Of course it cannot be ruled out that in some wealthy households the wife or other member of the family may have used the studio as well.¹⁴ However, although in practice the studio may have had a more flexible character, in the common perception and in the literature of the turn of the century this room was a specifically male space.

¹¹ LIPPIT/SELDEN 1991: 13.

¹² TADDEI 2021: 259–260.

¹³ TADDEI 2020.

¹⁴ INOUE 2003: 95.

3 The *shosai* in women's writings of the Meiji era

While Meiji male writers offered the reader a glimpse inside their studio, giving a behind the scenes look at the diverse yet ordinary spaces where their works were created, this is not the case in contemporary women's literature. A scrutiny of the works of the pioneering Meiji women writers shows the lack of women writer's self-representation within a studio. This is not surprising, because if on the one hand women writers began to publish at the end of the 19th century and were received enthusiastically in some literary circles, on the other hand critically acclaimed women writers were regarded suspiciously and were generally treated as exceptions.

Women's writing was acceptable as long as it was considered a hobby or a leisure activity carried out in a corner of the kitchen or bedroom.¹⁵ In this respect there are strong analogies with the condition of English women writers of the early nineteenth century as described by Virginia Woolf. "If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting room",¹⁶ she says recalling the case of Jane Austen who had no studio and wrote in the living room, making sure that neither the servants nor visitors noticed.

Japanese women could never be both "serious" writers and devoted mothers and wives.¹⁷ If a male writer in the Meiji era could retire to his studio and put his craft before everything else, even family obligations, this was not an option for women. Writing as a primary occupation was to be a male activity. If they really had to, women could safely write about bland romance, marriage and the household. In other words, "women writers had jurisdiction over a literary space that was defined, contained, and conscribed by men".¹⁸

Interestingly, as Copleand points out, the December 10, 1895 special issue of the newly established literary journal *Bungei kurabu* 文藝俱樂部 ('Literary Arts Club'), was devoted exclusively to the works of women writers and it featured photo portraits of three of them: Koganei Kimiko (1870–1956), Wakamatsu Shizuko (1864–1896), and Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–1896). Yet, none of them was presented in their studio or, at least, while sitting at their desk, as often happened for their male counterparts. The layout of their photographs was almost identical in style to the illustrations of 'beautiful women' (*bijin*) which decorated other issues of the journal. These photographic images were not meant to be an iconic representation of three writers but were used to entertain and please a male readership.¹⁹

¹⁵ COPELAND 2000: 36.

¹⁶ WOOLF/BRADSHAW 2015: 49.

¹⁷ The Meiji Civil Code (1896) had introduced paternalistic laws that relegated women entirely to the home and family, and in the 1890s the Home Ministry expressed the ideal of womanhood in the slogan "good wives, wise mothers".

¹⁸ COPELAND 2000: 47.

¹⁹ COPELAND 2000: 220–224.

Any woman who allowed her image to be reproduced in publications could be treated and stigmatised in the same way as the women of the teahouses and brothels.²⁰

As evidence of how even the studio space was influenced by the gender conventions of the time, I will refer to four texts written by female writers active between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In all four cases it is indeed evident that the *shosai* is owned by a male character.

Wakamatsu Shizuko (1864–1896), besides being one of the most prominent translators of English literature of the Meiji era, contributed significantly to the improvement of women's condition in Japan by writing and lecturing on the subject. Among other short stories for children, she published *Ōgon kikai* 黄金機会 ('A Golden Opportunity', 1893) in *Jogaku zasshi* 女学雑誌 ('Women's Education Magazine'). The story focuses on a seemingly marginal event in the life of little Toshiko. On her eleventh birthday, Toshiko receives a one-yen gold coin from her grandfather and a twenty-*sen* silver coin and a one-*sen* copper coin from her father. Although her mother explains to her that if the opportunity arises, she should spend the money wisely, the girl ends up using it to buy an organ she likes and feels guilty for disregarding her mother's words. The scene in which the girl receives the money as a gift from her grandfather takes place in his study.

I don't remember all the details, but I do remember that I was taken to my grandfather's room shortly afterwards. This was the grandfather's studio where he did his writing, and my mother came to clean up the papers and books scattered around. Looking back on it now, I remember that my grandfather was proofreading a manuscript. I watched him, and as my mother had already told me, I sat quietly and patiently.²¹

This is the only occurrence of the term *shosai* in the story. It designates the room where the grandfather works and which is clearly not a space for the women of the house. The mother enters it only to clean and the child can stay there as long as she remains quiet and does not disturb.

Godai-dō 五大堂 (*The Temple of Godai*, 1896) was one of the last pieces that Tazawa Inabune (1874–1896) wrote before her premature death at age twenty-three. Published posthumously in the November 1896 issue of *Bungei kurabu*, the novel portrays the ill-fated relationship between the handsome protagonist, the writer Imamiya Yoboro (aka

²⁰ MACKIE 2003: 27.

²¹ WAKAMATSU 1995: 33–54. Here and in all the quotations below, the words *studio* or *study* are translations of the Japanese *shosai* used in the source texts. Except for my English translations of Takahashi Terutsugu, Wakamatsu Shizuko, Higuchi Ichiyō, Miyao Tomiko, Miyamoto Yuriko and Hayashi Fumiko's works, the other English translations presented in this paper are taken from the main published collections on modern women's literature.

Hōtō Sanjin), and the naïve young heroine, Itoko,²² who falls in love with him. Inabune focuses the reader's attention on the obstacles confronting women in Meiji society and criticizes the power of Meiji mass media, particularly the effect that Tokyo newspapers' gossip columns had on an author's career and on the social status of their victims.²³ In order to emphasize the image of Imamiya as a dandy novelist the narrator tells us that he owns a studio with newspapers and magazines scattered all around. Itoko's elder brother, Fusao, mentions the studio while discussing his intention to become a writer with his friend Imamiya.

“Well, the first time I called, the books were neatly put away on the shelves, but lately, every time I visit, there are newspapers and magazines scattered all around. It looks rather like my own study. Why have you suddenly become so slovenly? It's a bit shocking.”

“Ah, well, since I've met you, law has become so tiresome. It's too stiff and logical. Since I've always wanted to, I've started writing something, half in jest. I was hoping you might take a look at it. Ever since I've been at my writing, my study has naturally fallen into this state.” The young master replied awkwardly, offering a weak excuse to cover up the fact that, in imitation of Imamiya, he had put his study in disarray on purpose.²⁴

What is implicit here is that the studio is a space typically associated with a male writer or male household members. Also, the fact that Imamiya's studio is in disarray tells us something more about this character, highlighting his bohemian and careless nature. Thus the physical space of the studio reflects Imamiya's interiority.

In her *Imin gakuen* 移民学園 (*School for Émigrés*), published in *Bungei kurabu* in May 1899, Shimizu Shikin (1868–1933) tackles a socially sensitive issue: the discrimination against the *burakumin*, Japan's hidden caste of untouchables. Imao Kiyoko (Okiyo) is a happily married woman, but although she leads a very comfortable life together with her caring husband, Imao Harue, she is extremely anxious about her father who has disappeared after sending her a strange and troubling letter. She will eventually find out that her father is deliberately hiding their *buraku* origin from her, so as not to ruin her social reputation by revealing her that she is of *buraku* origin. In the scene below, the

²² Itoko is a representative of the so called 'daughters in boxes' (*hakoiri musume*): girls pampered by their parents and denied any real education. The upbringing of these young women “was like the cultivation of bonsai trees, whose shape is created by the trimming of roots and leaves” (MACKIE 2003: 20). Itoko, however, does not want a customary arranged marriage and is relieved by her betrothed's death shortly before the wedding. She then falls in love with Imamiya and becomes a rebel, willing to sacrifice her family and any social respectability in order to be with him.

²³ COPELAND/ORTABASI 2006: 158.

²⁴ COPELAND/ORTABASI 2006: 165.

woman is still unaware of her father's whereabouts and joins her husband in his studio to share her worries with him.

Harue Imao²⁵ was quite tired. He had been busy enough with party affairs, but after being asked to join the new cabinet, visitors had started coming at all times of the day or night so that he never had a moment's rest. [...] For the first time in a long while, he retired to his study, hoping to relax. Now Harue Imao sat quietly on the edge of the veranda, stroking his moustache.

He had the thick brows of a man not yet forty. The light in his eyes was sharp and penetrating, and yet there was an air of gentle refinement about him as well.²⁶

The studio is essentially a private enclosure where the husband can retire to relax, although it functions here as the place where the couple can have a conversation on a sensitive subject away from prying eyes.

The last example is from *Seigon* 誓言 (*The Vow*, 1912) by Tamura Toshiko (1884–1945). Edward Fowler describes her as a “feminist author, recalcitrant wife, renegade lover, and long-time expatriate in North America and China [...] perhaps the prototypical dangerous woman, being neither “good wife” nor “wise mother” (never becoming a mother at all, for that matter), in defiance of exhortations by Meiji officialdom”.²⁷ *Seigon* is the story of a married couple who decide to divorce after a violent quarrel triggered by futile reasons. Seiko, the main character, is a woman who has enough confidence in her physical and emotional identity not to prostrate herself before her husband, who declares his willingness to separate because he does not love her. However, for a moment she pictures herself kindly begging him to retract his intention to divorce and, while he is out, she steps in his studio for the last time.

“Forgive me. It was entirely my fault.” If I were to say this and then prostrate myself before him, he would surely beam with joy. This was the beautiful scene I envisaged, of kneeling before my husband, my hands outstretched toward him...

I stepped into his study, seized by the desire to be in his room. I pulled open the drawer to his writing desk, traced my hand along his bookshelves, and clasped to my breast his beloved figurine cast in the image of Salammbō. Then I leaned up against the desk and imagined myself in his embrace. Still, he did not come home.²⁸

²⁵ In contrast to this article, which adopts the Japanese convention to give surnames first, the translation quoted follows Western practice for names.

²⁶ COPELAND/ORTABASI 2006: 245.

²⁷ COPELAND/ORTABASI 2006: 339.

²⁸ COPELAND/ORTABASI 2006: 372.

Interestingly the studio space clearly becomes here a surrogate of the man himself. Holding his husband's belongings and leaning up against his desk, Seiko recalls for the last time the warmth of his embrace when they were newly married and in love.

Of course the absence of literary images associating women writers with the studio does not exclude the possibility that some may have had one. Keene recalls that Okamoto Kanoko (1889–1939) “kept on her desk pens of different thicknesses and colours, and changed the pen according to the nature of the material”²⁹ while writing her *Tsuru wa yamiki* 鶴は病みき (*The Crane Falls Sick*, 1936). One wonders where her desk was located and whether she had her own studio or used that of her husband, the cartoonist and writer Okamoto Ippei.

Among women writers who displayed enough self-awareness to present themselves in the act of writing, an interesting case is that of Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–1896), a representative of the first generation of Meiji writers. Unlike female colleagues such as Tanabe Kaho (1868–1943), for whom writing was a kind of pastime suitable for a well-born girl, Higuchi wanted to become a writer not only for pleasure but also to gain economic independence and support herself and her family. Although she failed to achieve that goal, it nonetheless led her to work tirelessly, producing around twenty novels in the short span of her brilliant literary career, which lasted only four and a half years. Living in strained circumstances, Higuchi cannot afford a studio where she can work undisturbed; all she has is a desk in the room she rents together with her mother. She refers to this Japanese-style writing desk (*fuzukue*)³⁰ in her diary production, as in the pages of *Mizu no ue* 水の上 (*Upon the Water*), the diary she kept from 1894 after moving to Hongō Maruyama Fukuyamachō. Here on 20 February 1896 she writes,

With the sound of raindrops falling from the gutter, with the noisy voices of crows waking up in their nests, slumbering at my desk, I suddenly awaken from a dream. Counting on my fingers today is 20 February: slowly the things around me acquire their real colour and I also acquire the awareness of my reality, what my name is, how old I am and so on [...].

With my chin resting on my hand, sitting at my desk, I am caught up in thoughts: I am just a woman, whatever ambitions I have I will almost certainly not be able to realise them in the end. Will I ever be able to live comfortably in the pure spirit of

²⁹ KEENE 1984: 1125.

³⁰ Her original desk is now 'enshrined' in the Museum of Modern Japanese Literature in Tokyo (KAWANA 2018: 177). Sitting at this desk Higuchi reflected elsewhere on the status of women. While recognising the literary merits of the two court ladies who were the symbols of classical Japanese literature of the Heian era (794–1185), Murasaki Shikibu (970?–1019?) and Sei Shōnagon (966?–1025?), Higuchi believed there was no need to idolise them. She argued that they were not divine geniuses, but women similar to those of the Meiji era, and that the latter could write novels, too, if only they were put in a position to do so (LIPPIT/SELDEN: 2015: vii).

poetry? [...] I am told I am a pessimist. Why is that? I make ink flow on fragile sheets of paper that are then published. Then come trite compliments like ‘prodigious writer of our generation’, praises full of respect but vain, that might change tomorrow. How sad! In the literary environment, among the people I meet every day, there is no one I can consider a friend who really knows me: I have the feeling of being born alone in this world. I am a woman. No matter how many decisions I might take, will I ever be able to realise them in this society?³¹

It is interesting to note that *Mizu no ue* was written nine months before her death and one month after the release of the novel *Uramurasaki (Pale Violet)* and the publication of the last instalment of *Takekurabe (Growing Up)*, which was enthusiastically received. Success, achieved laboriously through perseverance, talent and indispensable recognition by leading figures of the male literary establishment of the time, brought her notoriety and slightly improved her living conditions. New friends and admirers visited her daily to bring her gifts, ask for autographs or lessons on poetry and literature.

In the passage quoted, her pessimistic reflection on the hollowness of fame and the limitations that being a woman entails arises while she is sitting at her desk. Here she seems to distance herself from her surroundings in order to find the concentration necessary for her work. Her figure as a writer is not set in a space clearly designated for this activity, but rather emerges in relation to an object, the desk, and through her gestures: resting her chin on her hand,³² running the brush on the paper.

The contents and purpose of Higuchi’s diaries has been the subject of extensive critical debate³³ that is beyond the scope of this article. However, if one accepts the thesis that they were written with the even unconscious hope that they would be published and that they record Higuchi’s personal and artistic growth, then *Mizu no ue* shows us a mature self-portrait of the artist. On the one hand, her self-portrait is shaped by current circumstances, but it also recalls the classical iconography of Heian-era lady writers seated at a writing desk overlooking a veranda, or certain portraits of *gesaku* authors intent on reading or writing at their Chinese-style table while seated upon a floor cushion.³⁴

Later generations of women writers would fantasise about having, in addition to a desk, a room of their own: an intimate, private place where the imagination and the pen could run wild. A *shosai* which, a century after Higuchi, Miyao Tomiko (1926–2014) effectively describes as follows in *Watashi no iru basho* 私のいる場所 (‘The Place Where I Am’, 1988):

³¹ HIGUCHI 1934: 179–180.

³² The expression 机に頬杖をつく (*tsukue ni hōzue tsuku*) used by Higuchi to describe her posture is recurrent in literature. Sōseki, for example, often uses this locution when referring to himself in his studio or describing the reflective attitude of his characters, such as Toyosaburō in *Koe (The Voice, 1909)*.

³³ FOLLACO 2019: 2–6.

³⁴ KERN 2007: 283–294.

My study is not meant to be shown off, and as I spend all my spare time working as a housewife, this is the only room where I can play in the world of my imagination, play the harp and burn incense at my pleasure.³⁵

4 Reclaiming a room of their own

Despite the disparagement of women writers by Meiji society, factors such as the growth of women's literacy in the following decades, the emergence of newspapers targeting female readers, and the growth of urban wage-earning women in the services industry contributed to accelerate the pace of social change and the empowerment of women writers. During the first decades of the twentieth century, independent, self-sufficient and self-confident young working-women shattered conventional gender roles. From the 1920s on, numerous women writers from different strata of society such as Hayashi Fumiko, Hirabayashi Taiko, Miyamoto Yuriko, Sata Ineko, Tsuboi Sakae and Uno Chiyo gained popularity and saw their novels successfully published. "Their writing was not limited to a particular literary genre or form. It included autobiographies, histories and dramas, as well as poetry and fiction".³⁶ By publishing in women's journals, women writers became more visible and strengthened their reputation, notwithstanding the overriding assumption that writing was inappropriate for the wifely role.

It was in the second decade of the twentieth century, during the Taishō period, that women started to argue that a wife, too, should have a place of her own, and that a studio was naturally desirable for a female writer. For example, Misumi Suzuko (1872–1921), the head of Tokiwamatsu Jogakkō women's school, writing in the October 1917 issue of *Jūtaku* stresses the importance of a study room for housewives. Also, she describes what her ideal studio would look like, if she had the chance to renovate the one she was currently using.

Her ideal study would be equivalent to a six-mat room in size and located on the second floor with a southern exposure. The furnishings would preferably be Western, with a desk, chair, and book-case as well as a couch on which she could take a minute from her busy schedule to relax.³⁷

Similarly, the academic Inoue Hideko (1875–1963), describing her own house, states that it was planned so that she and her husband would have a studio of their own. She also notes the psychological advantages of having a comfortable Western style studio, a room where she can enjoy "a sense of freedom and privacy".³⁸ At the time there were certainly few

³⁵ TAKAHASHI 2013: 272.

³⁶ ERICSON 1997: 5.

³⁷ INOUE 2003: 95.

³⁸ INOUE 2003: 96.

housewives and women writers who could have a private *shosai*, but the fact that articles or essays related to this space were published in women's and architectural magazines made them a model for wider segments of the population.

Interestingly, the novel *Kanojo no seikatsu* 彼女の生活 (*Her Daily Life*, 1917) by Tamura Toshiko portrays the life of Masako, a promising writer, before and after her marriage with Nitta, a philosopher and critic. Despite the difficulties of her post-marital life and the burden of maternity and housekeeping, she has a studio of her own where she can retire in her spare time. Although Masako reluctantly accepts her destiny of being a good wife and a loving mother, she does not abandon writing. Having a studio where she can read and jot down her thoughts turns out to be an important resource for her happiness, and a lifeline in dark times. This is the place where she eventually writes a brilliant essay on the lives of women after marriage.

Having stopped assisting her husband with his work, she began to hide in her study. There, she was absorbed in her own creative writing. What was frightening, however, was that after nearly two years of housework, the habit never stopped neurotically urging her to attend to chores of all kinds. When she was at her desk, chores around her suddenly occurred to her and tormented her. Nor was she able to completely forget Nitta. While he was out, she was peaceful, but when he was home, her attention was drawn toward him in ways that obstructed her thoughts.

Her creative writing did not at all proceed. For days in a row, she was absentminded whenever she was in her study. In the end, she even considered herself unable to create her own world. [...]

Her efforts were not wasted. When a critical essay she finally finished writing was published, it instantly met high appraisal from some young men and won popularity. The essay, which poignantly introduced the lives of women imprisoned in marriage, revealed her thorough thinking, candid expressiveness, and ardent emotion.³⁹

Masako embodies the condition of many Taishō women writers who were trapped between professional pursuits and family obligations, and found it difficult, if not impossible, to balance domestic duties and child care with the demands of their art.⁴⁰ Since their identities were tied to the act of writing, marriage often hindered their progress for the additional responsibilities it imposed on them.⁴¹ Therefore, the sole choice left was often between not getting married at all or giving up writing once married. It was generally the husband who had a space of his own within the marriage to work and grow. A condition that, as Sata Ineko acutely observes in *Nenpu no gyōkan* 年譜の行間 (*Between the*

³⁹ LIPPIT/SELDEN 2015: 20–21.

⁴⁰ SUZUKI 2010: 76.

⁴¹ A similar dynamic can be found for example in *Kurenai* (*Crimson*, 1936–1938) by Ineko Sata.

Lines of My Personal Chronology, 1983), still characterises the lives of many working women in the post-war period, and is rooted in the idea that the woman must act as her husband's 'assistant'.

For the past fifty years, right down to the present, the problem for women of having to choose between work and marriage has persisted. [...] Men need a wife as an assistant. It's just the opposite for women. Far from getting an assistant, in most cases, women wind up sacrificing their own work for married life. Since the end of the war, I have had occasion to meet and work with a number of female reporters, but most of them remain single. I think that is pretty harsh...⁴²

Also, the fact that Masako needs an appraisal from a circle of young intellectuals, all men, reflects the status of women writers at the time.⁴³ However, on the other hand, the portrayal of Masako studying in her room – a room she forbids her husband to casually enter – reflects new ideas about domestic architecture and the role of women within the household.

5 A space for creativity: Miyamoto Yuriko and Hayashi Fumiko's *shosai*

The novelist and social activist Miyamoto Yuriko (1899–1951), known for her involvement in proletarian and women's liberation movements, was among *Jūtaku's* contributors. In her *Shosai o chūshin ni shita ie* 書齋を中心にした家 ('A House Centred on The Study'), published in the September 1922 issue of *Jūtaku*, she describes the ideal house she and her husband, both writers, would like to live in. In the following lines she presents herself as a professional writer who makes a living out of her writing in the very same way her husband does, thus imagining a house equipped with two studios suited to their needs.

Those who work at their desks, like us, want to have a quiet and nice studio before all else, if they can realize their dreams. It doesn't have to be magnificent and made of beautiful materials: we would like a study room that suits our personality and our work.

If one spends most of the day in that room, the guest room, dining room, bedroom, etc are all spaces that should be designed to relieve the tension accumulated while in the studio, and to comfort a slightly tired head.

⁴² LOFTUS 2004: 219.

⁴³ The difficulty for a woman to follow the path of an artistic career and to free herself from the artistic judgment of a man is a recurrent theme in Tamura's novels. For instance, *Akirame* (*Resignation*, 1911) shows a female playwright prevented by her family from continuing her artistic career, and *Onna sakusha* (*A Woman Writer*, 1913) describes a woman who struggles for inspiration, but is married to an established writer who undermines her confidence in writing.

I hate direct sunlight from an east or a south facing window, at least when studying, therefore I would like a north facing studio. There should be a wide bow window and, of course, Western-style, solid wooden bookshelves all around. The walls are covered with dark green wallpaper and the upper part of the walls and the ceiling are pure white; the entrance is small, and when you step inside, the quiet sunlight and the serenity emanating from the furniture should completely calm your mind; the manuscripts on a large and wide desk should draw your heart and invite you.

With a little beloved painting on the wall, a chaise longue on which to stretch my body slowly and indulge in my thoughts, and a piano in one corner, I would be completely satisfied.

[...] I am writing these lines in an eight old *tatami* room bothered by the train noise, and as I said it is only my ideal or maybe just a fantasy. [...] However, to be honest, if I can efficiently use a decent room and a proper desk, and if I can have my work done there, I completely forget about the house, and in the end, I stop worrying about it [...] I don't feel at all the necessity of possessing anything, so if a rich estate owner rents a house at a good price and under safe, reasonable conditions, I'll stay there until I die.⁴⁴

Thus, for the author, not only should the ideal house have a studio designed to facilitate writing, but the function of the whole house should be conceived in relation to the activity she carries out in the studio. Expressing her own ideas about the studio through the pages of a popular architecture magazine entailed addressing the issue of the organization and distribution of domestic space, which, as Sand (2003) shows, is one of the nodes of intellectual and political concern during the creation of a modern nation-state in the late Meiji and Taishō periods. It was during these years that the abstract concept of home (*hōmu* or *katei*) was born, and articulated through the image of the bourgeois mononuclear family.

Through textbooks intended for the education of well-born daughters and magazines dedicated to upper middle-class women, ideologues and national reformers expressed the idea that “woman’s innately gentle and sensitive character made her particularly suited to the duties of housekeeping”.⁴⁵ The modern bourgeois ideal of the housewife was a married woman “without work obligations outside the house”,⁴⁶ assisted by one or two live-in maids who took care of the less pleasant household chores. A woman who harboured no career ambitions outside the home because she considered domestic work “a calling as intellectually rewarding as any other technical profession”.⁴⁷ The housewife had an

⁴⁴ MIYAMOTO 1981a: 5–9.

⁴⁵ SAND 2003: 61.

⁴⁶ SAND 2003: 62.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

education that enabled her to manage the household economy, prepare meals and maintain a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. In short, she was in charge of nurturing and protecting what was considered to be the core of the national ideology: the family. Consequently, her domain was primarily the kitchen, organised according to new architectural standards that made her work easier.

By describing a home centred on the study in which the kitchen is not even mentioned, Miyamoto proposes an unconventional division of domestic space and seems to challenge the new bourgeois construct of the *shufu* (housewife), advancing the possibility that women could also perform other, more intellectually rewarding tasks, and operate autonomously within a space of the home outside the kitchen.

Despite her final statement that any decent room would fit her needs, the fact that she thinks about her ideal studio more than she is probably ready to admit is manifest, if one looks at another piece on the same topic. In her *Shosai no jōken* 書齋の条件 ('My Studio's Requirements'), published in the September 1923 issue of *Jūtaku*, she clearly states what her studio should be like.

I will list the requirements of the study as I pictured in my imagination.

(1) it should be always quiet and sunlight should enter the room with no significant variation. The windows are large so that you can see the emotional changes in the thick evergreen leaves and deciduous trees.

(2) To prevent humidity and fire it is Western-style and all the furniture has a soothing colour. The floor is not squeaky.⁴⁸

In the July 1923 issue of *Jūtaku* she adds more details about the studio she covets, and in *Shiji no henka to kakawari no nai shosai* 四時の変化と関りのない書齋 ('A Study That Is Not Subject to the Seasonal Changes') she states:

I can't think of any particular requirements for the study during the summer. I want a place that is not too bright, has trees nearby, is quiet and has good air circulation all the year round. I would much prefer not to let the changing seasons guide my study. I prefer that the change of seasons should not affect my permanence in the studio. Except when nature all around gives me a different view.⁴⁹

Statements such as these have even more value when one considers that, eight years earlier, no women were included in the list of 34 writers and intellectuals interviewed about their ideal study, in a survey conducted by *Shinchō* magazine and published on 1

⁴⁸ MIYAMOTO 1981c: 11.

⁴⁹ MIYAMOTO 1981b: 10.

March 1915.⁵⁰ Likewise, the 1 May 1921 issue of the literary magazine *Bunshō kurabu* published the results of a questionnaire submitted to 35 respondents about their preferences and arrangements concerning their studio. The interviewees were novelists, translators, literary critics, journalists, poets, playwrights and, needless to say, all men (Hoshō 1995: 85).⁵¹

Comparison with these data shows the extent of Miyamoto's statements, which cannot be reduced to a simple expression of her taste in interior design. It is worth remembering that from September 1924 to September 1926 the journal *Kaizō* ('Recreation') serialized her first masterpiece, *Nobuko*, a semiautobiographical work based on her personal experience as a married woman and shaped by 1920s discourses on topics such as love marriage, divorce and women's desire for self-realization in public and private spheres.⁵² Four years of marriage had convinced Miyamoto that marriage was "detrimental both to women's happiness as individual human beings and to their creativity" and that "it was necessary to be independent from men, emotionally as well as economically, in order to secure a room of one's own".⁵³ The description of her ideal *shosai* could therefore be interpreted as an expression of her commitment to her work, and a statement of her ambitions as a women writer, fighting for her artistic and economic independence and thus deserving such a creative space. In other words, the studio she dreams about is not only a physical space but also an ideological one: an indispensable space for women's literary production. Also, it could be read as an indirect reference to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.⁵⁴ Wakita Hiromasa (2007) mentions the fact that Miyamoto Yuriko

⁵⁰ Natsume Sōseki, Tokuda Shūsei (1872–1943), Satō Kōroku (1874–1949), Ōsugi Sakae (1885–1923), Saitō Mokichi (1882–1953), Abe Jirō (1883–1959), Kume Masao (1891–1952) were among the others as reported in *Sōseki Zenshū* (1996, vol. 25: 588).

⁵¹ HOSHŌ 1995: 85. The complete list of the interviewees included Ikuta Chōkō (1882–1936), Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke (1892–1931), Nanbu Shūtārō (1892–1936), Takasu Baikei (1880–1948), Tokuda Shūsei (1872–1943), Nagata Mikiyō (1887–1964), Sakai Toshihiko (1871–1933), Ogawa Mimei (1882–1961), Masatomi Ōyō (1881–1967), Kawaji Ryūkō (1888–1959), Akiba Toshihiko (1885–1965), Shibata Katsue (1888–1971), Ikuta Shungetsu (1892–1930), Ubukata Toshirō (1882–1969), Mikami Otokichi (1891–1944), Fukuda Masao (1893–1952), Funaki Shigenobu (1893–1975), Nakamura Hakuyō (1890–1974), Kojima Masajirō (1894–1994), Kimura Ki (1894–1979), Kusuyama Masao (1884–1950), Miyahara Kōichirō (1882–1945), Shinjō Waichi (1891–1952), Shibata Seihō (1882–1944), Ōizumi Kokuseki (1893–1957), Chikamatsu Shūkō (1876–1944), Yamamoto Yūzō (1887–1974), Shimada Seijirō (1899–1930), Sudō Shōichi (1886–1956), Mishima Michiharu (1897–1965), Kuriyagawa Hakuson (1880–1923), Yoshida Genjirō (1886–1956), Okada Saburō (1890–1954), Kamitsukasa Shōken (1874–1947), Fujimori Seikichi (1892–1977).

⁵² SUZUKI 2010: 79–104.

⁵³ MIZUTA 2018: 95.

⁵⁴ Although the first complete Japanese translation was published in 1952 by Nishikawa Masami and Andō Ichirō, Woolf's work had already been introduced in Japan by Miyamoto's time. Therefore, even those who were not specialists in English literature like Miyamoto could read extracts from Woolf's essay and discuss its contents (WAKITA 2007: 23).

knew and had read excerpts from the essay and although she was critical about it,⁵⁵ it might have stimulated her considerations on the importance of a private and independent space for women.

If the above passages are relevant as expressions of the author's desire to have a *shosai* of her own, in *Shinpen uchiake no ki* 身边打明けの記 ('An Account of My Private Life'), first published in the December 1927 issue of *Bunshō Kurabu*,⁵⁶ we see her within her actual studio. In this account of her life, she describes her domestic routine and talks about her travels and hobbies as if she is answering a questionnaire. Among other issues, she talks about her writing habits and the studio's arrangements.

On my desk there is a slightly yellowish paperweight, like a Manchurian goat. There is also a lapis lazuli inkstone, some white manuscript paper, a table lamp with a lovely round lampshade and a crimson dyed linen rug made in England. These are all my favourite things. [...]

I like the light rays in my study to be dim. In summer, I deliberately close the *shōji* screens. It's hot and painful, though.

The manuscript paper I use is the blue ruled with 400 characters on each page from Hongō Matsuya bookstore. I use a G-pen,⁵⁷ one pen a day.⁵⁸

To better understand the relevance of this passage it is worth remembering that at the beginning of the 20th century newspapers like *Asahi* were publishing interview series such as *Bunshi no seikatsu* 文士の生活 ('Writer's Lifestyle') on the lives of famous writers like Natsume Sōseki, Nagai Kafū, Morita Sōhei. To satisfy readers' curiosity they were encouraged to speak on personal as well as literary matters, and their interviews were later converted into *danwa* (literary chats). They were interviewed on set topics such as their income, hobbies, likes and dislikes, domestic routine, studio's arrangements and

⁵⁵ As WAKITA Hiromasa (2007) has pointed out, Miyamoto Yuriko believed that the conditions that Woolf emphasized from her relatively privileged position – economic stability and a room of one's own – were difficult to obtain for a Japanese female writer and far from the real needs of any Japanese ordinary women of the time. Therefore, while sympathizing with Woolf's ideas of 'freedom' and 'steady life' for women, she thought that her essay could not be a fundamental and concrete guideline for achieving new social change for women. Also, while concerned with the problem of women's happiness and creativity she was "disturbed by the alienation of elite intellectuals from the masses" (MIZUTA 2018: 91).

⁵⁶ Published by Shinchōsha from May 1916 to April 1954. In the early days, the magazine was mainly concerned with novel-writing techniques and styles for beginners in literature, but later also essays and short stories by representative writers of the Taishō era began to appear. Also, it frequently published recollections of writers, accounts of their experiences and gossipy reports on the state of the literary world.

⁵⁷ A type of dip pen.

⁵⁸ MIYAMOTO 1981d: 361–369.

writing habits.⁵⁹ The focus was upon the writer within his domestic sphere, with no mention of marriage or family matters and, of course, only male writers were interviewed. These, for example, are Sōseki's remarks published on March 22, 1914 in the *Asahi* newspaper.

The old Chinese saying “a well-lit study with a clean desk” expresses my taste [...]. I would prefer to write in a room with *shoji* screen that receives sunlight, but unfortunately there is no such room in my house. Therefore, sometimes I bring my desk out onto the veranda and set to work while basking in the sun [...]. The paper sheets I use to write are printed by Shun'yōdō with the logo that Hashiguchi Goyō designed for me. Each sheet has ten vertical columns with nineteen squares. [...] For five or six years I used a gold nib to write, then I switched to the fountain pen. The one I use now is my second Onoto^{60, 61}

For Miyamoto Yuriko, writing about her studio is also a way to evoke precious childhood memories, as she reveals in *Sofu no shosai* 祖父の書齋 ('Grandfather's Studio', 1939). Here, while recalling her visits at her grandparent's home in Mukōjima when she was a child, she dwells on the description of her grandfather's studio. It was a small quiet room on the second floor where she was not permitted to go without her grandmother. A shining rosewood bookcase lined with books, which she saw from a distance through her grandmother's legs, and a picture of her grandfather are the features that undoubtedly left a vivid impression on her and contributed to encourage her passion for books and literature.

Miyamoto Yuriko represents herself within her own studio also in *Tsuioku* 追憶 ('Reminiscences')⁶². On a humid summer day, she recalls the death of a beloved uncle who used to retire to the study she is using now. The studio becomes here a physical correlative of her interiority, and memories related to this space strengthen the relationship between uncle and niece even after his death.

It has been raining for two days but it gradually stopped and now the heat begins to come out again. [...] Being easily affected by weather conditions I feel incongruous. Sitting in the studio all day long while gazing at the gorgeous appearance of the trees and at the rows of books I am so pleased by, surrounded by a languid

⁵⁹ MARCUS 2009: 120–124.

⁶⁰ Onoto was the brand name of a fountain pen manufactured in England and imported to Japan by Maruzen. In the short essay *Yo to mannenhitsu* ('Me and the Fountain Pen', 1912) Sōseki talked about his taste in fountain pens and admitted that he had given up Pelican for Onoto.

⁶¹ SŌSEKI 1996: 427–430.

⁶² MIYAMOTO 1981e. This short piece first appeared in the 1981 complete edition of Miyamoto Yuriko's works.

tranquillity, I somehow remembered the death of my uncle who died slumped on his desk in the very same place where I am sitting right now. [...]

I was seven years old when my uncle passed away.

He usually stayed in his room from morning till night, living among his books. At that time what has now become my studio was a shadowed room, because long eaves blocked direct sunlight; it was a 5-mat room in good condition, empty and fit for thinking, so it was immediately designated as “Uncle’s room”. On the shelves all around the room there were many books that had just been taken out of the trunk and for which there was no space. Many thin brown books were tied up with hemp ropes and lay scattered around.⁶³

Interestingly, the studio, here associated with personal reminiscences and the author’s tendency toward introspective self-searching, is occasionally described in her fictional works, but mostly as the private room of a male character. This is what happens for example in *Futatsu no niwa* 二つの庭 (‘The Two Gardens’, 1947), an autobiographical sequel to *Nobuko* where Miyamoto traces her life after her divorce. Although the female protagonist is a professional writer who enjoys an independent life, the term *shosai* occurs seven times to identify the space where three male characters – Tamotsu, Ōgawa Toyosuke, and Aikawa Ryōnosuke – retreat to study or receive guests. Also, while reflecting on the distinction between bourgeois and proletarian realism, the protagonist Nobuko uses the word *shosai* in reference to one of her favourite scenes in *Anna Karenina*, when Anna approaches the cold-blooded husband in his studio to confess her affair with Vronsky: a reflection of how deep-rooted the association of this space with a male owner was.

Moving on to Hayashi Fumiko (1903–1951), I will show how she describes her studio and represents herself within it in *Seikatsu* 生活 (‘Lifestyle’), a short text written in 1935.⁶⁴ It is a well-known fact that Hayashi was one of the first women writers in modern Japan to be recognised by the *bundan* authority. She was famous for having fought “her stubborn struggle against the rigid laws of patriarchal culture to establish herself as a working woman and a writer”⁶⁵ and for her literary portrait of a woman “determined to free herself from difficult situations [...] and ready to fight to build her own happiness, even by disregarding the expectations of society and the family”.⁶⁶ At the beginning of the 1930s, Hayashi had her *Hōrōki* (*Diary of a Vagabond*) successfully serialized (1928–29) and was able to begin a relatively comfortable life, even if she preferred to spend her royalties on travel to China and Europe. This attitude seems to have lasted until she and her husband

⁶³ MIYAMOTO 1981e: 324–325.

⁶⁴ The essay is dated February 5, 1935, but was not published until April 10, 1936, in the collection *Bungakuteki danshō* (FESSLER 1994: 152).

⁶⁵ SCROLAVEZZA 2012: 71–72.

⁶⁶ SCROLAVEZZA 2011: 16.

Rokubin built their house in 1941.⁶⁷ From the time she arrived in Tokyo in 1922 until late in 1939, she had changed residences at least a dozen times. In *Ochiaichō sansenki* 落合町山川記 ('Records of Mountain and River in Ochiaichō', 1933), she describes her life in different areas of Tokyo and, in particular, recalls two houses she rented in Ochiai, a district where many writers and artists lived. The second house was bigger than the first, nonetheless she kept moving her desk from one room to another, because she didn't have a quiet studio of her own. "Sometimes I felt like I was travelling, writing on the kitchen table or in the living room," she confesses.⁶⁸

However, according to *Seikatsu* the situation improved when she could finally afford a house with a studio in Shimo Ochiai. In this short account of her life in her thirties, she touches on different topics: her struggle to find writing inspiration, her being a nocturnal writer, her love for flowers, painting (Matisse and Modigliani in particular) and travels, her mostly male friendships, scornful reviews of her novels and even her interactions with the tax inspector. The description of her existence is a mixture of entries from a diary she had kept three years before, introspection and nuggets of wisdom. In general, as Fessler puts it, "the structure of the essay reflects the way she spent her day; it jumps from one subject to another, unable to focus on one topic".⁶⁹

She also talks at length about her studio on the second floor and her activities there. The studio is almost like a sanctuary where she can immerse herself in reading and writing while her maid and husband are asleep. Although the account is fictionalized, nonetheless the self-portrayal of a woman who considers herself a *mannen bungaku shōjo* (a forever literary girl)⁷⁰ and the description of a space arranged to fit her needs as a writer pursuing a career undoubtedly challenged gender boundaries and gendered spatial arrangements within the household. The studio and not the kitchen is the room where she spends her most valuable time.

Here is a longer excerpt from *Seikatsu* in which Hayashi recounts the pleasure it gives her to retreat to her study in the evening. She also describes her gestures and habits that put her into the most suitable mood for writing.

A poem I write longing for what?
 Japanese apricot and plum blossom simultaneously
 The dark green of the plum, taking a bath
 Ease of living in the countryside

⁶⁷ FESSLER 1998: 183.

⁶⁸ HAYASHI 2003a: 18.

⁶⁹ FESSLER 1994: 128.

⁷⁰ A girl who likes literature, wants to make it and live within it forever.

I love this poem by Murōsan and every day I sing it like a song. “A poem I write longing for what?” as this song says, I’m not longing for anything. I stay up till late at night and I sit at my desk almost every day. I am writing a novel about this useless daily routine. After dinner together with the young maid we arrange the greasy kitchenware with greasy kitchenware and cups with cups; while chatting about what’s on at the nearest cinema and other things we tidy up and by the time I change the water in a vase with cut flowers it is already past 8 o’clock. When I go upstairs to the study on the first floor with three evening papers in my hand, the fire in the brazier is dying down. I add some charcoal, place an iron kettle over it and while the water heats up, I look at the three evening editions. We have three newspapers at home, Asahi Shimbun, Nichinichi Shimbun, and Yomiuri Shimbun, and the first thing I look at is the theatre and movie listings. They are showing *Onna no kokoro* [A Woman’s Heart] and I would like to go. There is *Eien no chikai* [An Eternal Vow]. I want to see them all but often I cannot go to the small cinema in the outskirts.

Once I have read the listings, I move to articles on the third page and I read them from the small column at the bottom. Even if the three newspapers report the same news, since news looks very different it is very interesting to read them. I rarely look at the political section. So, I know less about politics than elementary school students. [...]

The minute I finish my newspaper reading the water begins to boil. This moment is like heaven to me. I breathe on my glasses and I clean the round lenses with tanned leather. Then I pour some tea and I touch various things on the desk. I feel like asking them “Are you ok?”. The pen I use is a fountain pen. The ink is Maruzen’s Athena ink. I bought a big bottle of half a litre and I decanted its contents in a smaller vase for fun. I am using it and I think it will last a couple of years. In front of the writing paper, I placed a small mirror and sometimes I amuse myself sticking out my tongue or spinning my eyes around. But when I start writing long things, this mirror bothers me so I end up throwing it on the bed. I don’t know why but my desk is so full of magazines and books that I can’t even put a flower on it. Pages of the Iwanami edition of selected Chinese poetry lie spoilt somewhere over the desk.

Even at 9 o’clock I am absent-minded while drinking tea. I have taken out an old diary and I am reading it. Sometimes I am oddly impressed, sometimes I find it amazingly trivial. [...]

At around 10 o’clock, people around me in the house say good night. When everyone goes to bed, I’m scared, so I check that all the doors are locked. Then I prepare a midnight snack in the kitchen and I take it upstairs. Salted kelp and dried bonito flakes make me feel really good. It’s cold these days, so I can’t help but reward my body when I’m staying up late. [...]

Because this is my daily life, however hard writing is, I enjoy it so I sit at my desk. I sit on a chair, but when it gets cold, I sit square on that chair for a while and I write. When I am writing, although I’d like to write uninterruptedly, the thing I hate most

is to look up a word in the dictionary and stay hopelessly on it forever. My dictionary is one of those for students' self-study and I bought it for 75 *sen* when I was wandering around Takamatsu in Shikoku, and it is already ragged. No matter how many times I buy a dictionary, this one is handy after all, so I keep using it even though it doesn't have enough words.

Really, when I think about it, my life looks like that of a schoolgirl in the countryside, but when I was asked to write something about my life, although my present one is not impressive, I started to feel that there is something noteworthy in it.⁷¹

No matter what kind of writer people think she is, in this account Hayashi presents herself as a poet and a novelist who has a dedicated writing space. She wants to be considered a professional writer above all, and entering the studio late at night becomes part of a ritual that can put her mind in the right headspace for productive writing practice. Also, in a materialistic sense, the display of a private studio can be interpreted as a status symbol. It states that she can make a living publishing poetry and fiction, and can afford to have such a place in her home.

One seemingly trivial detail is also worth considering. Hayashi admits that she cannot stand the presence of the mirror on her desk while she is writing. If we understand the mirror as an object traditionally associated with the widespread idea that women should be charming and seductive, the gesture of throwing it on the bed could be interpreted as a refusal to adhere to the canon of a male-defined femininity.⁷² Moreover, as the mirror is associated with the act of putting on make-up in both a real and metaphorical sense, Hayashi does not seem to be concerned here with beautifying her appearance, regardless of the fact that "with her makeup intact the woman writer felt protected against the charges of "unfemininity" which her public appearance on a male-dominated stage invited" (Copeland 1995: 5).⁷³ On the contrary, writing becomes the medium that reflects the

⁷¹ HAYASHI 2003b: 155–171.

⁷² Copeland reminds us how women writers at the time were seen as somehow less than women and how many of them had internalised this prejudice to the extent that they tended to describe themselves in unflattering terms. "They are infertile (Hirabayashi Taiko), ugly (Hayashi Fumiko), crippled (Nogami Yaeko), unmotherly (Setouchi Harumi), unlovable (Tamura Toshiko) and, as already mentioned, un-wifely" (COPELAND 1995: 8).

⁷³ COPELAND 1995: 5. In Tamura Toshiko's *Onna sakusha (A Woman Writer, 1913)* the woman writer usually puts on her makeup before she starts to write because this act seems to invigorate her creativity. However, eventually, the makeup becomes a sort of mask she is somehow obliged to wear in order to perform her role as a writer. In the end the "protagonist cannot write with this 'face'. That is, she can no longer write the things that are expected of her, the worthy subjects that have been defined by others. She can write only when she has found her own subject" (LARSON 2005: 37).

image of herself that the author considers most faithful and meaningful, and the studio is the place where this true self can emerge.

The association between the writer and her studio is reinforced by a photograph taken in 1932.⁷⁴ It shows Hayashi Fumiko sitting at her desk in the studio of the western-style house in Shimo Ochiai. She is portrayed while writing with a fountain pen in her hand, surrounded by books, ink bottles and a table lamp. Behind her are a small sofa with a floral cover and two dolls sitting on it, a fabric hanging on the wall and a large vase of flowers on a small bedside table. Her expression, absorbed in her writing, and the details of the room convey a cool, quiet atmosphere. Never mind that Hayashi is posing for the shot, pictures like this one are a decisive step forward from the representations of Meiji writers just as beautiful women. At a time when women writers were regarded as indecent women who abdicated the male ideal of femininity, she not only chooses to represent herself in the process of literary creation, but also shows herself in a space traditionally associated with a male writer. Although Miyamoto and Hayashi were very different in their lives and artistic choices, they represent two modern writers who, together with other female colleagues, challenged gender boundaries and paved the way for the recognition of the importance of women's personal freedom.

Following in their footsteps, Sata Ineko, a leading exponent of proletarian literature, published the novel *Kurenai* くれなゐ (*Crimson*) in 1936.⁷⁵ It “paints a vivid portrait of a professional woman much like Sata herself, a leftist writer struggling to negotiate her family obligations and her personal desires—as a mother, wife, and her family’s main breadwinner”.⁷⁶ Through Akiko, *Crimson*’s protagonist, Sata shows us “how a woman’s identity is not fixed, but fluid, how it overlaps with the various modes of femininity that are consciously or unconsciously imposed upon her—as a mother, granddaughter, wife, writer, friend, and consumer”.⁷⁷ Both Akiko and her husband Kōsuke are left-wing writers and political activists and, due to the repressive environment of the time, are arrested at various times. Despite sharing the same political convictions and both going through the harsh experience of prison, their marital relationship is undermined by deep misunderstandings, because their desire to grow as individuals and writers is ultimately out of step with their desire to grow together as a couple. Interestingly, one of the spaces that is subject to constant renegotiation within the couple is precisely the studio.

⁷⁴ Due to copyright issues, it is not possible to reproduce here the photograph that is visible in *Hayashi Fumiko zuihitsu-shū* (2003: 11).

⁷⁵ *Kurenai* was first published in instalments in the magazine *Fujin kōron* in 1936 and then in book form in 1938. In the novel, the character of Kishiko, Akiko’s friend, was modelled after Miyamoto Yuriko, whose husband, Miyamoto Kenji, was imprisoned for his leftist activities.

⁷⁶ SATA/PERRY 2016: 11.

⁷⁷ SATA/PERRY 2016: 12.

In the following scene Akiko comes out of prison after forty days and notices how during her absence the studio has been modified to suit her husband's needs. The opposite had occurred while her husband was in prison, but Akiko now has the feeling that along with that space she has also lost the opportunity to do so.

After forty days away Akiko finally returned home. [...] The relief she now felt from her investigation having concluded uneventfully—for the time being at least—should have given her the motivation to begin her next piece of writing. [...] Kōsuke, for his part, was leading what appeared to be a busy life.

After being released from prison over a year and a half earlier, Kōsuke had often complained of having no place of his own in the house. But now it was Akiko who felt something similar. It was as though the workings of the entire household had now fallen under Kōsuke's occupation.

[...] So invested was Kōsuke in his new calling as a literary critic that he stood visibly taller now—as did the stacks of new books that were piling up in his study. Although he shared with Akiko the plans he had for his new career, Akiko hadn't the emotional reserves to feel his excitement, never mind the wherewithal to cheer him on.

“Well, you sure have a nice set up here, don't you?” – Kōsuke had said this to Akiko when he'd come home from prison and taken full measure of Akiko's study. At the time he truly felt as though there was no place for him to sit down. Both of them, of course, more or less understood the situation. In Akiko's case now, however, it wasn't just a matter of having no place to study—it was that Kōsuke had become the household's new centre of gravity. As a writer, Akiko began to worry that the very foundation on which her career was grounded had been pulled out from under her.⁷⁸

Both Akiko and Kōsuke feel they deserve a room in which they can concentrate on their writing projects. However, unlike Kōsuke, for Akiko losing her study space seems to imply the loss of recognition of her role as a writer who contributes to the family's economic support. Therefore *Crimson* shows us an ambiguous reality. The possibility that a woman has as much right as a man to have a studio where she can write profitably is no longer a pipedream. But that this possibility actually materialises is far from a given, even in a couple where the husband has seemingly progressive ideas. After all, when the novella was first republished in 1953, critic Yamamoto Kenkichi, inspired by Virginia Woolf's famous phrase, “lamented how the average Japanese woman still lacked a room of her own”.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ SATA/PERRY 2016: 160–161.

⁷⁹ SATA/PERRY 2016: 11.

6 Conclusion

In the autobiographical texts by Miyamoto Yuriko and Hayashi Fumiko considered here, the female writer recounts certain facts of her life within a space in which she can express her desire for creativity. It is in this space that the material rituals useful for writing – and writing itself – take place. Their self-representational narratives are subversive for two reasons. Not only does the affirmation of a female subjectivity challenge and subvert “all patriarchal assumptions about what the individual self is and how its story should be told”,⁸⁰ but also, by sitting down to work in her studio, the female subject enters and takes possession of a place traditionally reserved for men. She uses the space of the *shosai* in a way that was not consonant with the gender-differentiated experience of the world of her time.

One might wonder whether for Miyamoto and Hayashi having a studio and talking about it was the answer to the same needs. The issue is a complex one because it inevitably involves the different social backgrounds of the two, and the value that the society of the time attached to the studio. In this regard, Marcus’s remarks on what the *shosai* represented, in an era of relentless commercialism and rampant careerism such as that in Japan between the late Meiji years and the 1930s, are revealing. He argues that “from an economic perspective, the private study in a home of one’s own was a desideratum of those who made a living – be it as writers or bankers. Affordability was an issue. While the *shosai* serves as a metonym for the writers and the larger *bundan* collectivity, it is also an index of social class and a status symbol, embodying Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital. One would naturally want to collect books (among other material objects) and the well-stocked library would enhance one’s stature, in a crudely materialist sense”.⁸¹

Miyamoto Yuriko grew up in a comfortable environment and as the daughter of a well-known architect she received a good education both in Japan and abroad. The examples of her beloved uncle and grandfather may have helped ingrain in her the belief that the studio was a naturally desirable space for any writer or scholar, regardless of gender. However, her political activism in the Communist Party may have caused her to feel a certain contradiction between her critique of the bourgeois model and her access to a space that was certainly out of reach for women and writers from the less advantaged social strata. All the more so since she herself was critical of *A Room of One’s Own*, precisely because of the rather privileged status from which Woolf speaks of women’s condition. Be that as it may, one still gets the impression that by discussing her ideal studio, especially in *Jūtaku*, Miyamoto Yuriko does not only express a personal desire, but also

⁸⁰ LOFTUS 2004: 45.

⁸¹ MARCUS 2009: 126.

touches upon a socio-political issue. Reclaiming a domestic space other than the kitchen means carving out a space in the literary world and, ultimately, also proposing a different, self-formed model of femininity that departs from old-fashioned and modern expectations of what a woman should be.

For Hayashi Fumiko, on the other hand, “who knew only abrasive poverty until she was close to thirty”,⁸² the studio represents a fulfilment of a more personal and less political urge. It is both a way to establish herself as a writer within the *bundan* and a form of social uplift. Hayashi wrote of herself that “the only ideal she ever had was to get rich quick”.⁸³ Thus, depicting herself within her own studio signifies having accomplished her goal of becoming a full-fledged author, free from the financial worries experienced in her youth. The fact that she is a woman who successfully pursues her professional ambitions has the positive effect of presenting, as in Miyamoto’s case, a female subjectivity different from the mainstream. However, due to the intimate nature of the work, it is misleading to read *Seikatsu* as a text that stems from feminist claims or aspires to intervene in the debate about the social role of women.

Nevertheless, despite the differences in life paths and personal ideas, Miyamoto and Hayashi forged a female literary persona who, by appropriating the writer’s image in the studio, undoubtedly engaged with the dominant representation of the *shosai* as a male gendered place, and undermined it. A private space to pursue and cultivate one’s artistic vision was no longer an exclusive male prerogative. And like their male colleagues, they could offer their readers a glimpse of their studio and the activity they pursued in it.

In conclusion, due to the reciprocity between status and space, the studio as a male gendered room was a reflection of the mainstream culture and socially acknowledged differences between men and women in modern Japan. Changes of ideas about the role of women within the family and society also affected spatial arrangements. Articles in which women writers openly professed their desire for a room of their own and descriptions of their writing habits in a studio concurred to challenge the predominant image of the male writer within his studio. This subtle shift in the representation of the studio space might seem negligible, but it is worth remembering that “spatial arrangements typically fall into the category of things we do not think about. Therein lies their power; they have the ability to sustain the status quo without encountering resistance”.⁸⁴ Thus, precisely because spatial arrangements are easily ignored, the conquest of the studio should be emphasised and placed among the achievements of modern Japanese women writers.

This success would especially benefit the generations of women writers active in the postwar period. With the removal of censorship on any discourse that did not depict

⁸² KEENE 1998: 1138.

⁸³ KEENE 1998: 1140.

⁸⁴ SPAIN 1993: 147.

women as workers or thrifty mothers capable of effectively managing their families in times of economic hardship, women writers were able once again to address the space in which their artistic and literary creativity could be expressed.

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