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Literature, Ideology and Women's Happiness: The Autobiographical Novels of Miyamoto Yuriko

Mizuta Noriko

Although the liberation of women was one of the basic concerns of the Meiji intellectuals who struggled with the question of modernizing the self—and thus the women's liberation movement has a long history in modern Japan—women's concerns were generally left to women intellectuals and treated separately rather than as a part of broad social movements. Similarly women writers were classified separately (as “female-school writers”) and their literature considered a special category related only tangentially to the central activities of modern Japanese writers.

Heirs to a long tradition of women's literature in Japan, modern Japanese women writers tended to focus on emotions and psychology, while women's status in a modernizing society was excluded from the principal literary currents. Japanese proletarian literature, which reached its peak at the beginning of the Showa period (1926-present), was no exception in this regard. Such major writers as Kobayashi Takiji paid only scant and superficial attention to the questions of women, and in general the theoreticians who were concerned with the questions of laborers, peasants and intellectuals in revolution ignored women.¹

Miyamoto Yuriko, a leading proletarian writer of the first half of the Showa period, stands out in this context as an exceptional figure, as a writer who placed women's concerns at the center of her literature and integrated them with the socialist movement of her time. She began her writing career as an idealistic humanist who was disturbed by the alienation of elite intellectuals from the masses, yet in her attempt to grow into a real intellectual, liberated from the conditioning forces of her bourgeois background, she came to realize that being a woman imposed an obstacle as great as any other she confronted. She came to believe that overcoming the class nature of her philosophic and aesthetic ideas and becoming a truly liberated woman were both crucial to living a rich and meaningful life. She saw the family and marriage system, feudal institutions

preserved in the interest of modern capitalism, as the primary forces oppressing women. At the same time, she noted the failure of women intellectuals to grasp the class nature of their ideas, and their cynical and reactionary retreat into false femininity. For Yuriko, being a humanist meant being a feminist and communist revolutionary, and the humanist, feminist and revolutionary struggles were necessary truly to liberate human beings.

Miyamoto Yuriko was born into an upper-middle class, intellectual family in 1899 and died a committed and major communist writer in 1951. She accepted historical incidents as personally significant events and grew from a bourgeois humanist into a humanistic communist, from an intellectual observer into a committed fighter, from a bright, overprotected daughter of an elite family into a liberated woman, and, above all, she grew into a fine fiction writer who combined history and individual experience in literature. Her art is a mirror reflecting the complex history of Japan and the inner life of the Japanese artist who lived through it.

She dealt with three major concerns throughout her life, concerns which she considered central problems or conflicts to be solved. They are the questions of consciousness and practice, women's happiness and creativity, and politics and literature. Focusing on her ideas on women, I would like to examine how these central problems and her consciousness of them shaped her creative works and are reflected in them.

A precocious writer, Miyamoto Yuriko published her first novel, *Mazushiki Hitobito no Mure* (A Flock of Poor Folk), in *Chūō Kōron* in 1917, when she was only eighteen years old.² It appeared with a strong endorsement by Tsubouchi Shōyo, who observed that she was endowed with keen perception and an ability to think originally, qualities that are clearly shown in this first novel. The novel is about an *ojōsan* (an honorable daughter) from Tokyo who visits the remote agricultural village owned by her grandfather. The protagonist, observing the details of the poor peasants' life, becomes appalled by the injustice of the system of land ownership as well as by the distortions which absolute poverty creates in human psychology and character. In her sincere attempts to help the poor peasants, she meets only vicious greed and apathy on the part of the peasants and cynical arrogance from the village elite. Although the work is filled with youthful sentimentalism, Yuriko's treatment of the protagonist's deep self-reflection and self-analysis when she confronts the absolute defeat of her upper-class humanism is impressive. The novel ends with the protagonist's determination to find something, however small, which could be shared with the peasants and her determination to grow into a person who understands life.

What principally characterizes the novel is the author's tendency toward introspective self-searching, together with her idealism and strong faith in human good will, characteristic traits which were to stay with her the rest of her life. Reflecting the strong influence of Tolstoy and such writers of the Shirakaba group as Arishima Takeo, she expresses in this work a youthful and hopeful belief in the union of consciousness and practice, and her determination to contribute to human welfare. In this respect she

differs from the naturalist writers and urban intellectuals of the late Meiji period (1868-1912), whose discovery of the deep chasm between themselves and the peasants, and of the evil of a system which separates people so absolutely, merely led them to an overall pessimism and desperation about human nature.

Soon after the appearance of this novel, however, she was confronted by a serious contradiction between her consciousness and practice, a contradiction which emerged not so much from social conditions as from her personal life. In 1918, she accompanied her father, a prosperous London-trained architect, to New York, and while studying at Columbia University she fell in love with Araki Shigeru, a scholar of Oriental linguistics fifteen years older than her. Although she was passionately in love with him (he appears as the character Tsukuda in the novel *Nobuko*), the marriage was important for her in other respects too, since it would allow her to be independent from her family, assuring her a new start in life. She saw it as a way to live as she wished, to develop her feelings and sensitivity, and her husband declared his commitment to help her do so. Yet in her marriage, to which her parents objected unyieldingly, she found herself still trapped by the feudal institution of the family, with pressure from the family as a daughter replaced by even heavier pressure as a wife. She went through an agonizing and futile struggle with her mediocre scholar-husband, a security-seeking, emotionally cold man, and she concluded that the occupation of housewife, with its emotional and mental inactivity, petty hypocrisy and banality of thought, is totally detrimental to human creativity. She realized that she would have to sacrifice her imagination and creativity as a writer unless she were to be reborn as a different woman or unless society's attitude towards women were to change. She discovered from her four years of marriage that a woman becomes emotionally and psychologically vulnerable to her husband, and at the same time, paradoxically, that the "security" of the wife's role justifies and maintains relations between man and woman on the basis of the family institution rather than on the basis of real human involvement in each other.³ Her experiences in marriage were soon to become the basis of her first masterpiece, *Nobuko* (1923), which, like all of her subsequent novels, is highly autobiographical in nature, reflecting the experience and realization of a particular phase of her life.⁴

Unlike many women, Nobuko did not think she could change her life-situation by finding a new love, for then she would just be moving from one man to another and would still be someone's wife. It was not that she disliked her married life because she compared Tsukuda with someone else. It was because of the many difficulties that the incompatibility of their personalities created and because she could not accept the differences between men and women in the way they fulfill themselves in marriage, differences which are accepted generally. Either she would have to be reborn as a different woman or the common social ideas of sex life would have to change in certain respects for her to remain married without problems.

To be perfectly honest, she could not claim to be free from apprehension about her independent life in the future. She could not imagine that Tsukuda was unaware of her subtle weakness. No matter how eager Nobuko was for her independence, he saw through her weakness, thus allowing her to act as she liked, like a spoiled child, and called her his “baby.”

(*Nobuko*, p. 133; my translation)

Yuriko-Nobuko also discovered the hypocrisy of intellectuals who argue for ideals but have no intention of living according to them.⁵ She determined to live according to her beliefs, distinguishing bourgeois intellectualism from revolutionary intellectualism, and paid a high price to put this into practice; the traumatic experiences during the four years of what she called her “swamp period” convinced her finally that any ideas which were not substantiated by her personal life were meaningless. She set out to establish her own life-style and to live according to her ideas.

When she became a communist after living for three years (1927-1930) in the Soviet Union, she was forced to confront the social and political implications of her belief that consciousness can be intellectually meaningful only when it contributes to a concrete change in life which facilitates one’s inner growth. Subject to the heavy censorship of her writings and the strenuous experiences of trial and imprisonment after her return to Japan, her health deteriorated and she suffered at one point from a complete loss of vision.

Yuriko received Akutagawa’s death as the tragic self-dissolution of a bourgeois intellectual fundamentally alienated from life itself, as the total defeat of his intellectualism and aestheticism. She was chilled by the thought that she herself might follow his path if she continued to live as a detached intellectual writer.

During these years, when she was not allowed to write freely, she committed herself to leading a study-group composed of women, and to writing essays on women,⁶ as well as to writing letters to her second husband, a communist who had been sentenced to life imprisonment.⁷ These years required a firm commitment; many writers, subject to great pressure and actual physical torture, declared, some truly and others superficially, that they had given up their communism, while a majority of the writers wrote non-political works or fell into silence. All suffered from self-doubt, self-pity, cynicism and desperation. Yuriko, together with Kobayashi Takiji, who was brutally murdered by the police, stand truly heroic in this context.

In *Nobuko*, the protagonist’s decision to give up her husband and to go against the desires of her family was for the sake of her personal growth and happiness. Although well aware that her action would invite criticism as an egotistical act, Nobuko is portrayed

as having felt at that time that marriage was detrimental both to women's happiness as individual human beings and to their creativity. It was necessary to be independent from men, emotionally as well as economically, in order to secure a room of one's own. Yet Nobuko's solitary life makes her experience the frightening loneliness and emptiness that exist in life without love. She comes to reconsider whether marriage itself is the problem or whether it exists in deviation from an ideal form of marriage.

In *Futatsu no niwa* (The Two Gardens, 1947), an autobiographical sequel to *Nobuko*, Yuriko traces her life after her divorce to her decision to visit the new Russia. Although she was now writing novels steadily and enjoying a newly independent life as a professional writer, she (Yuriko-Nobuko) suffered from loneliness and a sense of sterility which came from the absence of total involvement in human relations. After the divorce, she lived with a woman translator and came to realize the prejudice to which single women are subject in a male-oriented society and the distortion in their characters which women suffer because of it. They force themselves unnaturally to behave like men, yet they are more vulnerable than married women, more conscious of themselves as sexual objects, and cannot liberate themselves from sex. Her relationship with her friend Motoko gradually comes to resemble that between lovers, and Nobuko feels it a psychological burden.⁸ She feels that single women tend to become alienated cripples, deprived of proper objects of love, and realizes that a satisfying male-female or sexual relationship is necessary for women's happiness. Thus she comes to reject the androgenous existence which she once thought necessary.⁹

Nobuko-Yuriko describes two incidents which occurred during this period as decisive in her determination to step into a new life. One is the affair of her mother, then 52, with the 32-year-old tutor of her son. The unfortunate love affair, which ended in her mother's bitter disappointment, illustrated the tragic fate of women who could not find the correct channel for their passion and self-growth in the feudal family system. Nobuko-Yuriko came to realize the impossibility of love's transcending differences of age and environment, given the existing warped male-female relationship. At the same time, she found herself appalled by her mother's romanticism, so miserably removed from reality, and by the easy cynicism about love and men her mother adopted and her quick return to a bourgeois life after her brutal disappointment. There Nobuko-Yuriko saw a lack of the true passion which might have enabled her to develop the full possibilities of happiness and the meaning of life in love, even though defeated.¹⁰ Above all, Nobuko hated the hypocrisy of the intellectual who talks of beautiful ideas yet is a cowardly egotist in daily life.

She sees as well the traps created by women's vulnerability to romantic love. Women desire to be romantic heroines, finding happiness only in being loved by men. They spend all their psychic energy in loving and lose the capacity to see that they are only catering to an illusory ideal of femininity created by men. She sees in her mother

both passion misused and the lack of a true commitment to love. This realization leads Yuriko to explore love relations which are not based on romantic love.¹¹

The second decisive incident was the suicide of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke in 1927. *The Two Gardens* describes the profound shock brought by his death, a shock which resulted in her decision to go to Soviet Russia.

If indeed to grow in class awareness is the only correct way to live in history for a member of the bourgeoisie, how does such growth take place?

"Do you know?" Nobuko sat next to Motoko, who was proofreading, and continued,

"I know that there is a limitation in Aikawa Ryōnosuke's [Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's] intellect ... but how does the 'class transformation' occur in such individuals as you and I?"

She knew that among those who are identified as members of the proletarian school, writers who did not come from the working class or were not living in poverty, with the exception of such theorists as Shinohara Kurato, would be ignored. In fact, her own writings were indeed ignored by them.

Nobuko felt, however, that whether or not she was recognized by them, she had things to say as a human being and as a woman, and that she could not wipe out her own way of life. If she could stop her way of life somewhere because she became hung-up on some theory, why had she thrown away the life with Tsukuda, pushing his pleading face away with her own hand...?

"I think I will go to Soviet Russia. I would like to live there. I would like to see with my own eyes and experience with my own body everything there, good and bad."

*(The Two Gardens, p. 263; my translation)*¹²

Yuriko received Akutagawa's death as the tragic self-dissolution of a bourgeois intellectual fundamentally alienated from life itself, as the total defeat of his intellectualism and aestheticism. She was chilled by the thought that she herself might follow his path if she continued to live as a detached intellectual writer. Interestingly, her future husband, Miyamoto Kenji, made his critical start by writing a brilliant and influential essay, "The Literature of Defeat," in which he analyzed the class nature of Akutagawa's sensitivity, anxiety, desperation and aesthetics.¹³ At the time, Yuriko was already an established writer while Kenji was a very young man, fresh from the countryside, vacillating between politics and literature as his life's work. (Today he is the chairman of the Japan Communist Party.)

What particularly shocked Yuriko-Nobuko was Akutagawa's deep loneliness as a man. Akutagawa, firmly tied to his family, with a gentle, homemaker wife and bright children, was desperately lonely, starved for love. He fell in love with a woman whose intellect matched his own, but gave her up for the sake of his family. His sentimental overflow of emotion when he finally did so, and the pathetic sincerity of his subsequent

writings in which he describes his own feelings and sense of defeat, moved her deeply. There she saw a sensitive man burdened by obligations as a father and provider which drained his energies and damaged his fine sensibility. She recognized that Akutagawa's anxiety and sterility as a detached bourgeois writer would also be her fate and that she too would be a victim of the institution of the family, deprived of love. Here she gained a new insight in her struggle; it was not only women but men as well whose creativity was stifled by their efforts to cope with an oppressive reality. A vital love of life, of a life committed to active thinking, writing, acting and loving, sprang up in her. In order to complete and enrich her life she needed a liberated man. Human liberation, not merely women's liberation, was necessary.

Her concern with meaningful male-female relations deepened when she met Miyamoto Kenji and married him in 1932. This was also the point at which she actually joined the Communist Party, although she had already become a communist in Russia, begun to write Proletarian literature, and been engaged in active organizing work—particularly among women—since her return. After a short life together, both of them were arrested; Kenji was sentenced to life imprisonment, and a life of separation for twelve years started.¹⁴ Although she learned through her passionate love for this brilliant ideologue ten years her junior that women's happiness and creativity, supported by faith in life and in love, are truly compatible, this fortunate union was by no means earned easily.

In “Koiwaike no ikka” (The Family of Koiwai, 1934), Yuriko describes the wife of a communist forced to go underground. The wife, although uneducated, is endowed with natural intelligence and strength of character developed through a life of poverty. She is firmly committed to her husband and works hard to maintain the family under the unusual circumstances, supporting and taking care of her parents-in-law and her children. She is the epitome of the strength and endurance with which traditional women are usually supposed to be equipped. Although she is the actual center of the family, she comes to feel a curious sense of isolation and lack of purpose when her husband finally decides to go underground. She is an ideal wife for an activist, supplying abundant moral support, yet she knows clearly that an unbridgeable gap has been created between her and her husband, who were united only as partners in a home-making enterprise. The story ends as the wife, appropriately named as Otome (young maiden), realizes that there will be a day when he will not return home unless she herself joins the movement with equal seriousness and commitment. The story describes the growth of this maiden into an independent participant in life, and this growth is treated as an essential factor in true love-relations. Later, in *Banshu heiya* (The Banshu Plain, 1946), Yuriko deals with the question of ideological differences between husband and wife and concludes that the sharing of ideology and political actions is also essential.

Yuriko's relationship with Kenji was deeply satisfying. Contradicting her previous insistent stance, she changed her name from her maiden name Chūjyō to her husband's name Miyamoto, and assumed positively the role of daughter-in-law and sister-in-law in

his family. This evoked criticism and disgust among women writers and intellectuals, for she appeared to be protecting his male ego.¹⁵ Although we may discern in her attitude the concern of an older woman and established writer to eliminate any source of inferiority complex which her young husband might have, we would totally miss the point to see in it a willingness to assume the traditional role of a woman. However, although she believed that what she was doing was right, she later came to realize that she was indeed trying to protect her husband's male ego and was thereby creating another fraudulent male-female relationship.

In *Banshu heiya*, a work dealing with her love of Kenji and set in the days around the end of the war, Yuriko presents her protagonist, who is unshakably certain of her love for and commitment to her husband, as naturally attached to his family. Her concern with and understanding of the women in his rural, lower-middle-class family is alive, devoid of any intellectual aloofness, and filled with genuine love. In this novel, the protagonist achieves a genuine tie between herself and the working class and peasant people from whom she is separated by education, class and cultural-social background.

What makes this possible, twenty years after her first novel and *Nobuko*, is her understanding of the common fate which women in the Japanese family system share and her commitment to proletarian revolution. When the protagonist of *Banshu heiya* Hiroko, hears that her brother-in-law was among the victims of the Hiroshima holocaust, she visits her husband's family in Yamaguchi prefecture, a visit which renews her recognition that women have once again had to bear the tragedy of the war and society more heavily than men. Her sister-in-law, now widowed, changes into a nervous, greedy and calculating woman, losing all tenderness toward other people. Saddened by the psychological distortion created in this woman, Hiroko is struck by the misery which women in the family system have had to endure. She feels it unfair that the maintenance of the system depends upon the endurance of women, and is at the same time appalled by the role which women had assumed in maintaining this dehumanizing and sexist system. She calls the strength produced in the frail woman's body at the time of emergency and the psychological and mental distortion caused by it "*goke no ganbari*," the widow's stubborn strength.

The recent autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir also resembles her works in its basic attempt to trace the inner, as well as social, growth of the author-protagonist, and to place her in history. By placing inner growth within a concrete historical and social framework, history and individual life are uniquely interfused, creating both a personal drama and social, intellectual history; Yuriko's hero is an honest reflection of herself, yet she emerges as a universal, modern hero.

Yet soon this widow's strength/distortion is to be found in Hiroko-Yuriko herself, and worst of all, this is pointed out by her husband, with whom she is finally reunited after twelve years of separation. In *Fūchiso* (1946), Jyūkichi (Kenji) points out that her over-anxious, protective attitude to himself and to his family is *goke no ganbari*, and suggests that she return to a more relaxed attitude. His observation of her widow's hardness and strength, implying a lack of femininity, is a male chauvinist one, yet she realizes that her eagerness to protect her husband was indeed distorted and mistaken, that she was unconsciously adopting a protective attitude toward him just as a husband might do toward his wife, and that the love relation must be based on mutual equality and independence. The full cycle had come; twenty years earlier she had suffered from the hypocritical protectiveness of her older husband and she was now unconsciously assuming the same protective role towards her younger husband.

Most importantly, when the question arose of her rejoining the Communist Party, the executive committee of which Jyūkichi-Kenji was now a member, she asked him to let her work in a way that would let her continue to write novels. He replied that she must work in her own way, and must continue to write novels. With this understanding she joined the party without hesitation, but later found that he had foreseen a possible conflict that might have wrecked their love had she not done so. Although Yuriko's decision to join the party was reached from her own belief and the decision was hers, ironically it was the same experience which her protagonist in "The Family of Koiwai" had gone through. Ideological sharing was an important condition for love. Yuriko here argues that ideal love is the most human one, in which each partner is concerned with his or her own life without an overinflated confidence in bringing happiness to others, but a love based firmly on the support of and faith in each other. Together with such support, complete sharing of basic attitudes toward life and the same world view are considered necessary; this is the hardest demand made on women, the demand to participate in political as well as intellectual activities as equals of their men. She calls such a relationship that of humanistic communism. Women's happiness must be instrumental in the development of their creativity, while there will be no happiness where creativity is stifled.

Yuriko believed in human growth as the most significant purpose of life. She committed herself to communism only when, impressed especially by the condition of women in Soviet Russia, she came to believe in it as an ideology which aids both human growth and social justice. For her, human growth was not a matter of inner awareness, but could be achieved meaningfully only in relation to others: it could be achieved only by living within the real world, within history, in vital association with other people. For this reason, personal concerns—ideal love relations especially—and social and political ones become interfused in her creative activity. In her understanding, practice takes a central role; the pursuit of art for life's sake and of intellectual activity for its practical consequences provided the means for her to unite life and ideas, life and writing.

Yuriko's firm belief in human growth, her unending interest in and love of women, and her commitment to positive male-female relations make her close to such writers as Simone de Beauvoir. Like Beauvoir, she lived passionately, creating her own life-style as a woman, and tried to create a unique autobiographical novel in which the protagonist emerges as a modern as well as an historical hero.

Yet of the three conflicts, the one which gradually came to concern Yuriko most in her later years was that between politics and literature. As I have noted, she started her creative career as a bourgeois intellectual, deeply influenced by the humanistic writings of Tolstoy and Arishima Takeo at a time when the moralistic, introspective "I-novels" (first-person novels) had established the tradition of the modern novel in Japan. The historical perspective of Yuriko's autobiographical novels distinguishes them from the traditional I-novels, in which the perspective of the author-protagonists is exclusively internal and psychological. This historical perspective grew stronger in the course of her writings. Although the conflict between consciousness and practice, the realization of which was to become central in Japanese writers' struggle against the I-novel, was clearly the starting point of Yuriko's writing and the basis for the development of her thought, when she was writing *Nobuko* she understood this conflict only as a problem of her personal growth, not directly related to history or society. When she came to realize that sexism is a political phenomenon, the conflict developed another layer of meaning, that is, the conflict between literature and politics. Writing about her personal growth, about achieving her personal freedom, came to appear to her the sterile self-satisfaction of an elite intellectual. Thus the conflict was transformed from a metaphysical-philosophic concern with realization (consciousness) and practice to a socially concrete question of politics and literature.

The early Showa period produced a flood of theoretical arguments with regard to proletarian literature and the writers' role in revolution yet did not produce many significant fictional works. Miyamoto Yuriko, together with Kobayashi Takiji, undertook the task of creating literature as a communist.¹⁶ Her problems were more complex than those of Takiji, who was committed to presenting situations or dramas in which the oppressed masses come to attain a revolutionary understanding and commitment to action, or than those of Tokunaga Sunao, another important proletarian writer who, himself coming from a lumpenproletariat background, writes naturally about laborers—their struggle for change, their limitations, their happiness and their distortions. Yuriko, on the other hand, was an intellectual who was keenly aware of her basic alienation from the masses and of the limitations of her understanding. She had not forgotten the bitter lessons she learned from the tragic failure of the humanist writer Arishima Takeo, who embraced proletarian literature and gave up his inherited property to become a socialist but later had to declare that the class nature of a writer cannot be transcended. After declaring that he could not pretend to be a socialist and could write only as a member of his bourgeois class, he committed love-suicide with a woman.¹⁷

During the first years of Yuriko's life as a communist,¹⁸ her writing suffered from didacticism and from dogmatic analysis; her best contribution during this period was clearly in the field of essay-writing, in which she analyzed the conditions of women. Although her belief that literature should contribute to the progress of people and should be meaningful to the emerging new class and generation was not shaken, she did come to feel uneasy about the possibility of artistic stagnation in her political life. Although Kenji was more than eager in urging her to pursue her novel-writing in her own way, for him there was no doubt that she should not write other than as a communist.

In *Fūchiso* (1947), the protagonist Hiroko hesitates to join the party because she still does not see clearly the relation between her art and political activities, and worries how her joining the party might affect her writing.

"Hiroko, will you leave your curriculum vitae since you are here (at party headquarters)."

"My vitae?"

She hesitated, feeling that it was too sudden. To present her vitae must mean going through a formal procedure to join the party.

"Of course, but..."

Hiroko was not prepared to do so here, at this moment. She felt that two kinds of work were pushing her from opposite sides of her body: literary work and political work concerning women, which was the natural consequence of her being a woman. At present she was occupied more with the latter. As a result, what she wrote became entirely educational....

"How would it affect my work?... If only I knew."

Whenever Hiroko wrote short educational pieces, Jyūkichi himself advised her to organize her political work, telling her that otherwise she would not be able to write novels. It was also felt keenly [by the communists] that they must produce specialists in every field of the humanities.... But when Jyūkichi asked her when she planned to write novels, how was it related to his suggestion to present her vitae? ...

"There is no reason for me to refuse if I know what my writing will be."

"Hiroko, you can only prove objectively through your own writing what is the best."

"I am very glad if I can work in that way...."

"But that you can write in a way most appropriate for your present concern does not mean that a writer does not have to assume historical responsibility in her own daily life.... People in the humanities are too preoccupied with it [the relation between politics and literature] in general.... It must be because their life and work are too personal. But in the case of husband and wife, the gap can become too big to bridge."

(*Fūchiso*, p. 256; my translation)

Her only solution was to maintain her determination to write novels in history and to find out what kind of novel is a good novel by writing with all her energy. Yet this was

an indirect way of saying that she was going to set aside the problems of politics and literature, and would be immersed in writing novels, not political novels but just novels. Indeed, most of her communist ideas were expressed in her essays and her novels deal almost exclusively with her personal growth. She was also totally committed to actual political activities, organizing, lectures, and so forth, as if she were trying to bridge the gap between politics and literature in this way.

When she started writing as a feminist, however, with her own life as the central theme of her novels—and that started with her postwar novels—the gap between politics and literature, and that between history and individual life, was eliminated. She had discovered new modern heroes, the oppressed class of women struggling for liberation, a class emerging to play an important role in the history of human liberation.

By writing autobiographical novels from a revolutionary feminist perspective, she achieved a unique combination of literature and politics, of history and individual life. The result was an overflow of creativity. *The Banshū Plain*, *Fūchiso*, *The Two Gardens*, and *Road Sign*, which were written within the short years of bubbling creativity between the end of the war and her death in 1951, were all autobiographical works and extensions of *Nobuko*, tracing her personal growth as a woman writer and woman communist, but these later works were distinguished from *Nobuko* by their communist-feminist perspective. She had plans for writing two more such novels, plans left unmaterialized by her sudden death.

The form of Yuriko's novels is closest possibly to the *Bildungsroman*, a form of novel which traces the moral as well as social development of an individual. Her works, most simply, are a communist and feminist variant of the *Bildungsroman*. The recent autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir also resembles her works in its basic attempt to trace the inner, as well as social, growth of the author-protagonist, and to place her in history. By placing inner growth within a concrete historical and social framework, history and individual life are uniquely interfused, creating both a personal drama and social, intellectual history; Yuriko's hero is an honest reflection of herself, yet she emerges as a universal, modern hero. Although Yuriko's hero is by no means portrayed as an ideal, superhuman woman, she is a positive hero whose faith in female and human liberation through communist revolution is unshakable.

Yuriko's works present the drama of a woman developing from a member of the bourgeois elite, dependent on men, into an independent, mature woman writer and communist; they also mirror realistically an important page in the social, moral and intellectual history of modern Japan. Thus Yuriko created a new form of autobiography, one in which the protagonist emerges as an historic figure of the age, living fully its limitations and possibilities. Her writings uniquely bring together the tradition of the I-novel and the historical, social commitment derived from her political activities.

Notes

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1.

The Japanese anarchists and communists considered women's demands as petit bourgeois and thus not revolutionary. They refused to establish women's bureaus in their organizations for fear that they would lead the movements in a petit bourgeois direction and mar cooperation with the male branch. See, for example, Takamure Itsue, *Jyosei no rekishi* (A History of Women; Kodansha, 1958).

2.

The complete works of Miyamoto Yuriko were published by Kawade Shobo, 15 vols., 1951. There are also selected works published by Aki Shoten (11 vols., 1949) and Shinnippon Shuppansha (12 vols., 1968).

3.

Yuriko kept diaries during the years of her love for and marriage to Araki Shigeru (*Nobuko jidai no nikki*, 1920-23, Yuriko Kenkyūkai, 1976). Such autobiographical stories written during the same period as "Chiisai ie no seikatsu" (Life in a Small House, 1922), "Hitotsu no dekgoto" (One Incident, 1920), "Yoi" (Evening, 1922), "Kokoro no kawa" (The River of Heart, 1925), in addition to the unrevised first versions of *Nobuko*, supply reliable information about her life during these years. See also Tomoko Nakamura, *Miyamoto Yuriko* (Chikuma, 1974).

4.

Nobuko was serialized in *Kaizō* in ten installments between 1924 and 1926. This original version was shortened and radically revised when the novel appeared in book form in 1928. The following quotation in the text is from *Selected Works of Miyamoto*

Yuriko and Kobayashi Takiji Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1969).

5.

The protagonists in Yuriko's novels are readily identifiable as real-life persons, and for grasping her world it is as appropriate to use the names of their real-life prototypes as of the characters themselves.

6.

In her early works (such as "Yoi") Yuriko had already been writing about the problems of women artists, especially about the difficulty of fulfilling the dual role of home-maker and creative woman, a theme which was developed as central in *Nobuko*. However, her interest in women in general and her linking of her personal questions to the larger problems of women took place when she visited Soviet Russia. Her commitment to women's liberation became apparent and unshakable only after her return from Russia, where her ideological understanding and perspective took definite form.

7.

Jyūninen no tegami (Letters of Twelve Years), 2 vols. (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1965).

8.

The relationship between Nobuko and Motoko was more than one of friendship between two women, both psychologically and in some respects physically. It is clear that Motoko was attached to Nobuko as a lesbian while Nobuko was not attached to Motoko in this way. However, Nobuko's need for close human relations did find an outlet, soon after her divorce, in her friendship with Motoko, and her new life with Motoko did supply her with a vision of a new start as significant as marriage.

9.

Yuriko had never advocated the maternal feminism which characterized such feminists of the Blue-

stocking group as Hiratsuka Raicho. Yuriko's own decision not to have children was based on her concern that women who spend their psychic energy on child-rearing and the emotional dependency on children it entails would have little remaining of the energy and emotional commitment necessary for a creative life. (See *Diary*). Yet her love for Miyamoto Kenji changed her attitude and she wished to have a child with him, a desire which was not fulfilled because of his prolonged imprisonment.

10.

As in many cases of women artists and intellectuals, Yuriko's complex relation to her mother was a crucial factor in her intellectual and emotional growth and the formation of her character. Yuriko was a keen and even cruel observer of her mother. Yet her admiration and sympathy for her mother as a woman grew over the years, enabling her to love her mother dearly. Yuriko has written as much about her mother as about herself in her works.

11.

Yuriko saw clearly the class nature of the aspiration for romantic love, viewing it as the product of the feudal-bourgeois concept of women, a concept which idealizes virginity, chastity and motherhood. See such essays as "New Monogamy," "Discussion of Love for a New Generation," "Passion for Home-making" in *Yuriko zenshū*, vol. 9 (Kodansha), and "On Chastity," "The Wife's Morality," and "The Morality of Marriage" in vol. 12.

12.

Selected Works of Miyamoto Yuriko and Nogami Yaeko (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1967).

13.

Yuriko must have read the essay in Soviet Russia, since she kept receiving *Kaizō*, one of whose issues carried Miyamoto's article. She tells

of her impression of the essay in her novel *Dōhyō* (Road Sign). Kobayashi Hideo's essay, "Samazama naru ishō" (Various Designs), received the second prize.

14.

Arrested in 1933, Kenji was imprisoned until 1945. Yuriko was arrested six times between 1932 and 1943; her time in prison totaled approximately two years. She was finally released

when her own health deteriorated from the imprisonment and when her parents died.

15.

The most outspoken critic was Hirabayashi Taiko, a woman writer and once an anarchist.

16.

Selected Works of Miyamoto Yuriko and Kobayashi Takiji (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1969).

17.

See "Sengen hitotsu" (One Declaration), *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi* (A History of Modern Japanese Literary Disputes), vol.1 (Miraisha), 11-14.

18.

She joined the Communist party Self-Representation in 1931.
