

# *Writers' rooms: theories of contemporary authorship in portraits of creative spaces*

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# Writers' Rooms: Theories of Contemporary Authorship in Portraits of Creative Spaces

CLAIRE BATTERSHILL

**Abstract:** This article analyzes two series of photographs and essays on writers' rooms published in England and Canada in 2007 and 2008. The Guardian's *Writers Rooms* series, with photographs by Eamon McCabe, ran in 2007. In the summer of 2008, The Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival began to post its own version of *The Guardian* column on its website by displaying, each week leading up to the Festival in September, a different writer's "writing space" and an accompanying paragraph. I argue that these images of writers' rooms, which suggest a cultural fascination with authors' private compositional practices and materials, reveal a great deal about theoretical constructions of authorship implicit in contemporary literary culture. Far from possessing the museum quality of dead authors' spaces, rooms that are still being used, incorporating new forms of writing technology, and having drafts of manuscripts scattered around them, can offer insight into such well-worn and ineffable areas of speculation as inspiration, singular authorial genius, and literary productivity.

**Contributor Bio:** Claire Battershill is a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow at the University of Reading. She has published articles on the Hogarth Press, modernist autobiographical narration, and writers' rooms, as well as a book of short fiction, *Circus* (Random House, 2014). She is currently working on a new research project, titled "Selling Real Lives," which focuses on interwar publishing and modernist biographies.

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In 1929, Virginia Woolf famously announced before a lecture hall full of female undergraduates that in order to write, one needed "500 pounds a year and a room of one's own" (13). Woolf's suggestion that a writer's ideal arrangement for creation is a private, individual space has since been extended beyond her original proposition to a more general interest in the rooms (even the most ordinary) in which authors have written the literature for which they are known. The material conditions of Woolf's own "rooms" have been studied, preserved, and even commoditized in the twenty-first century in books like *Bloomsbury Rooms* (2004), in the designation of her own writing room and the famously decorated houses of her contemporaries as heritage sites. The National Trust in England, and several smaller organizations in the United States and Canada, have turned such rooms into profitable tourist attractions. The architectural legacies of literary production, it turns out, can be a lucrative business. William Wordsworth's Dove Cottage, for example, receives an annual income of over 525,000 English pounds per year on admission prices to the cottage alone, and this figure does not account for gift shop sales or donations.<sup>1</sup>

For the armchair traveller, such literary tourism was facilitated by two recent series of photographs of writers' creative spaces. In January of 2007, London's *The Guardian*

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<sup>1</sup> This figure was arrived at by multiplying the cost of admission by the number of visitors per year; both initial numbers appear on the Cottage's website. It is a conservative estimate.

newspaper began to print a regular column called "Writers' Rooms." Each weekly article, printed in the Sunday Arts section, consisted of a photograph of a writer's room, accompanied by a paragraph by the author describing the space. There is no editorial commentary, simply the images and their accompanying paragraphs. The author never appears in the photographs, so the focus is exclusively on the room, with all of its bookshelves, knick-knacks, computers, fountain pens, and other accouterments of literariness. The photographs were taken by Eamonn McCabe, who had previously done a series of portraits of visual artists in their studios. In the summer of 2008, The Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival began to post its own version of *The Guardian* column on its website by displaying, each week leading up to the Festival in September, a different B.C. writer's "writing space" and an accompanying paragraph. In the Vancouver series, the writers themselves took the photographs.

These two serialized columns provoke questions about the role and nature of creative spaces in theoretical perceptions of authorship in the early twenty-first century. What contemporary writers do with "rooms of their own," might offer a quirky answer to Pierre Macherey's theoretical question about the origins of literature: "The real critical question is not: What is literature? (What does one do when one writes or reads?) The question is: What kind of necessity determines the work? What is it really made from? The critical question should concern the material being used and the implements so employed" (194). Although Macherey's use of "materials" is metaphorical, alluding to the mythic structures proposed by Claude Levi-Strauss in his structuralist poetics, in imbuing writers' rooms with significance these newspaper columns suggest that the literal and physical materials being used in authorial practice might also give privileged insight into the imaginative structures that literature is "really made from." Far from possessing the museum quality of dead authors' spaces, rooms that are still being used, incorporating new forms of writing technology, and having drafts of manuscripts scattered around them, can offer insight into such well-worn and ineffable areas of speculation as inspiration and productivity. The 85 rooms depicted in *The Guardian* (culminating in an exhibition in late 2008) and the 24 rooms featured in the Vancouver series prior to the 2008 festival display various trends in the cultivation of authorial spaces. These "living" rooms offer a different kind of interest than their dead canonical counterparts preserved as museums. Certainly, as Woolf wrote in "Hours in a Library," part of the interest in reading "the literature of one's own day" is to try, as much as possible, to access authors, to answer the questions: "What do living men and women feel, what are their houses like and what clothes do they wear, what money have they and what food do they eat, what do they love and hate, what do they see of the surrounding world, and what is the dream that fills the spaces of their active lives?" (23).

Whether the primary interest is the rooms or the people who write in them, these columns were immensely successful in 2007 and 2008. *The Guardian* photographs were mounted in an exhibition, which ran between 3 December 2008 and 17 January 2009 at the

Madison Gallery in London. On the other side of the Atlantic, various takes on the series arose in popular mass-market periodicals: Oprah's library was featured in the November 2008 issue of *O Magazine*, alongside photographs of the rooms of famous writers, and in December 2008, the popular magazine, *Entertainment Weekly*, began its own series on Writers' Rooms. Offering the private spaces of authors to their readers in the public media suggests an interest, either on the part of readers, or publishers, or editors, or all three, in the original material conditions of writing and creativity.

In addition to offering a glimpse of authors' tastes in home decoration, the images of writers' rooms can be considered biographical exercises. The connection to author "portraits" is made manifest in *The Guardian's* tagline for its series: "Portraits of the Spaces Where Authors Create." The connections between portraiture and biography are so palpable that their very definitions intersect,<sup>2</sup> and they are often used interchangeably. They do not, in what might be an initial distinction, even delineate verbal from graphic forms of art, particularly when used as descriptions, as *The Guardian* does, of both verbal and visual representations. In his discussion of author portraits that conventionally appeared at beginning of sixteenth-century texts, Roger Chartier suggests that "the function of the author's portrait is to reinforce the notion that writing is the expression of an individuality that gives authenticity to the work" (52). That same authenticity born of personality and individuality is called into play in the series, especially by invoking the term "portrait" to describe an image of a room rather than a person.

There is another sense in which the appeal of these photographs can be explained as primarily biographical, and a way in which the rationale for publishing and reading these columns is to give readers behind-the-scenes access to the creative processes and people behind the works they read. The connection of a writer's room to his or her private life is evident in the impulse in *The Guardian* and for the Vancouver Writer's Festival not only to show the image of the study, but to offer the author's explanations for the significance of the items depicted and of their arrangement. These paragraphs when combined with the portraits of the rooms taken by McCabe in the role of the photographer-biographer place biographical alongside autobiographical work. The Vancouver series, consisting of self-portraiture as well as self-assessment, is more purely autobiographical. The attention paid to mementoes, photographs, talismans, posters, and knickknacks is the kind of information that might be found in biographies or memoirs. The poet Simon Armitage is an exception in that he downplays the significance of the objects by which he is surrounded: "I'm not really fetishistic (don't need to be surrounded by lucky gonks)," but even he concedes that his writing room has objects that have personal significance: "I do have a display cabinet of

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<sup>2</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary offers both "A drawing or painting of a person, often mounted and framed for display, esp. one of the face or head and shoulders; (also) an engraving, photograph, etc., in a similar style. (Now the usual sense.)" and "A representation in speech or writing; esp. a vivid or graphic description."

photographs, souvenirs and mementoes” (SA par. 1)<sup>3</sup> More often, authors devote nearly the whole feature to the significant items the writing room contains. Al Alvarez is a typical example:

Behind the chair, there’s a wonderful Sepik river woven head from Papua New Guinea [...] It’s a fairly stern object and it encourages me to work — not that it succeeds much these days, but I love it. (AA par. 2)

Alvarez’s comment also connects to one of the most frequent items of interest in the writers’ rooms: objects or sayings that encourage productivity. These items vary widely, but include, in the Vancouver selection: “a false face mask”; “a motto to write by: *Do not pray that the load be lighter, pray that your back be stronger*”; “a photograph of two young women leaping into the air”; “a painting lettered with the quote ‘it is possible to be too concerned about oneself’”; “my parents’ old front door”; and “a hippopotamus in red overalls.”<sup>4</sup> *The Guardian* articles provide a similar assortment of encouraging talismans to those of the Vancouver Writers: a “Soviet anti-alcohol poster, with a healthy young party cadre refusing a glass of vodka”; “a small Ganesh – the God of Removing Obstacles”; a drawing of a “yoga ‘warrior position’ on the book stand [...] intended to urge me upwards and onwards”; and, one of the most intimate and disturbing: “The stick propped up against my work surface is the cane I was beaten with at primary school.”<sup>5</sup> These items provide what Vancouver writer Janet Marie Rogers calls “memories of home and who I am,” which suggests a direct insight into intimate personal detail (par. 3). Rogers’s suggestion is akin to Kathy Mezei’s notion that “one’s house or home is *in itself* an autobiographical act and practice” (84). This assumption seems crucial to the interpretation of these photographs as biographical that is encouraged by both the *Guardian* and the Vancouver project. What the writers’ encouraging slogans and objects suggest, in addition, is access to the source of writing. They give the sense not only that writers sometimes have difficulty starting to write, but that the beginnings of their works might be derived from a specific real object of their own choosing, an item selected and displayed in an “autobiographical act.” The literal inscription of language onto the authors’ walls, and the fact that these pithy sayings and quotations are discussed in much the same way as the face masks and woven heads is also a significant gesture in materializing the literary act from the moment of creation and

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<sup>3</sup> Authors from *The Guardian* will be parenthetically referenced by their initials, and each parenthetical reference will correspond to an entry in the bibliography stating the date of the article as originally published in the newspaper. These can also be accessed online, and the paragraph numbers refer to the online citation, which is also included in the bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> The authors of these quotations, in the order that they appear, are: Janet Marie Rogers, Anne Giardini, Charlotte Gill, and Jen Sookfong Lee. My citation methods will be slightly different for the Vancouver Writers, as all of the articles appear on the same page of the Festival website, noted in the bibliography. This being the case, I will include paragraph numbers in the parenthesis, intended to connect to the site in the bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> The authors of these quotations, in the order that they appear: Antony Beevor, Richard Eyre, Barbara Trapido, and Michael Rosen.

inspiration. The novelist Russell Hoban’s suggestion that his tremendously cluttered room “is what I call my exobrain,” (RH par. 1) also affirms the creative space as a possible locus of insight into a particular individual author’s creative process.

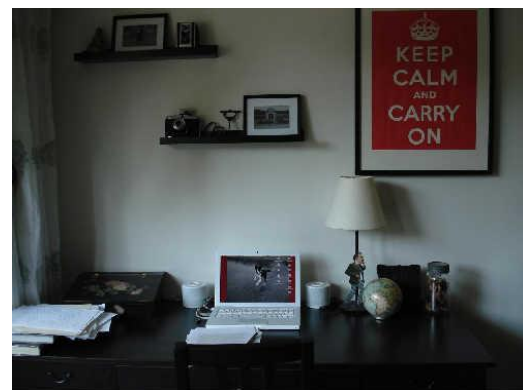
One of the notable features of these objects designed to encourage and facilitate writing, is that they are sometimes derived from or modeled on the behaviour of other, admired writers. On 26 January 2007, Sarah Waters stated that the “Keep Calm and Carry On’ poster is something I focus on in moments of crisis. They’re such wise words, and so soothing. I’m thinking of having them done as a tattoo” (SW par. 3). Waters’s repetition and valorization of this phrase is similar in effect to the quotations that are placed by other writers alongside objects of luck and motivation. The following year, in a Vancouver article, Aislinn Hunter’s office displays the same poster, with the comment that

The ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ poster I bought in England after seeing it in Sarah Waters’ Guardian desk photo. I met Sarah once and quite liked her and was having a difficult time in my novel so, inspired by why she had the poster, I bought one and now dutifully use it as a reminder to just work and work (and work) away. (par. 6)

The interconnection of the writers’ spaces suggests that there is a sense in the writers themselves that adopting the creative habits of more established authors might lead to greater productivity and success for themselves:



Sarah Waters’ room<sup>6</sup>



Aislinn Hunter’s room<sup>7</sup>

The Vancouver series’ explanation describes the impetus for displaying writers’ rooms to satisfy biographical interest: “Each week we will feature a different B.C. author’s writing space and accompanying essay so that you, the reader, can glean something about

<sup>6</sup> Image licensed by Guardian News and Media

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.writersfest.bc.ca/community/rooms/aislinnhunter>

the authors and the writing processes behind the books you love” (par. 1). The explanation goes on to suggest that showing writers’ rooms might also encourage readers to buy books: “Perhaps it goes without saying that if you buy their books you are helping writers to continue to practise their craft.” In this instance, the promotional suggestion is based on the causal construction that author-reader intimacy leads to sales. This same connection between biographical detail and the desire of readers to purchase the works of the authors is present, albeit more implicitly, in *The Guardian*, which lists titles of the authors’ books, their availability for purchase online, and their price, at the foot of each article.

Chartier’s notion that individuality and authenticity become immediately visible in a portrait at the start of a text is perhaps intensified when applied to authors’ rooms, since their ownership of these spaces is more concrete. Martha Woodmansee’s definition of an author “as an individual who is solely responsible – and thus exclusively deserving of credit – for the production of a unique, original work” (35) is confirmed in the portrayal of writers’ rooms as loci of literary creation. Woodmansee goes on to suggest that “‘Inspiration’ came to be explicated in terms of *original genius*, with the consequence that the inspired work was made peculiarly and distinctively the product – and the property – of the writer” (37). In order for literature to be considered the “property” of the author, Woodmansee suggests, the literary work must be dissociated from its content, and even the content must be dissociated from the form or mode of expression. The association of the rise of authorship with the rise of copyright in Woodmansee’s history of authorship responds to a self-proclaimed gap in Michel Foucault’s seminal essay “What is an Author?” in his failure to answer the question of how we came to associate authorship with originality and with individual genius. The aestheticization of writers’ rooms also consecrates the initial place of individual creation as an act connected with ownership of a space, a method, and, by extension, the literary products that emerge from this space.

Among the most directly illuminating statements that authors make in these paragraphs are those that compare the states of their desks or rooms to their processes of literary composition and revision. A common sentiment is that in the middle of a novel, story, or project, writing spaces are often chaotic and messy, while in the interim they are tidy and ordered. Jonathan Bate, in *The Guardian*, suggests that “the best thing about finishing a project is clearing the surface, dusting the glass and making a clean start on something else” (JB par. 3). The sculptural nature of this act relates to the architectural metaphors in Macherey’s figuration, and it also connects spatial and physical arrangement with textual construction. In this, as in several other instances, the metaphors for “crafting” literature and the spatial arrangement of rooms coincide. Starting with a clean office is linked to starting a new project with a blank page. David Harsent echoes Bate’s sentiment, and makes the metaphor explicit: “Clearing things is the perfect warm-up activity; it also extends to metaphor: there’s a sense of being newly unencumbered; it doesn’t last, but it’s heady” (DH par. 3). Vancouver writer Nancy Lee writes that “Like everything else I create, this photograph is a work of complete fiction, and the result of compulsive redrafting,

though in this case, the ‘drafts’ consisted of intensive periods of sorting, filing, tidying and culling” (par. 7).

In addition to the relative chaos or tidiness of the writing desk and the room itself, the frequency of planning materials posted around authors’ rooms suggests different methods of composition and crafting. The physical materials that authors use to construct a work are more various, it seems, and perhaps less uniform than those of visual artists, for example. Will Self’s planning materials are hundreds and hundreds of post-it notes arranged methodically around his walls:



Will Self's Room<sup>8</sup>

Helen Simpson takes the similar approach of laying out each page of her stories in order so that she can see the whole as she writes. Perhaps the most common method, though, is the cork bulletin board, specifically mentioned by ten of the writers in *The Guardian* and one of the Vancouver writers, and obvious in the photographs of the rooms of several more writers. Gillian Slovo describes the board as an essential compositional material:

The cork beside the desk is a changing smorgasbord of bits and pieces: pictures of landscapes about which I am writing; schedules of chores to be done; snatches of dialogue or phrases that have popped into my head and that I might use. At the moment it’s a disorganised set of images – part of creating the dream space I need to conjure up the next novel (GS par. 3).

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<sup>8</sup> Image licensed by Guardian News and Media.



Vancouver writer Stephen Galloway built his own shed for writing which consists of a specially designed composing system: “I like to make odd outlines and charts, and I also tend to pin up various photographs and maps and scraps of paper, so one whole wall will be cork board and another will be covered in acrylic plexiglass to make a sort of dry erase board system” (par. 8).

The writing process is of interest because it seems to offer insight into the question of how literary texts come to be. Roland Barthes, in “Death of the Author,” suggests that “The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*” (134). While Barthes advocates a critical practice and a reading temperament that resist attempts at “discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work,” one of the products of his post-structuralist descriptions of authorship is the broader conclusion that the “before” of literary works is still of significant scholarly and readerly interest (135). In the biographical reading, readers’ interest in writers’ rooms might be highly personal and also an extension of what M. H. Abrams calls the Romantic tendency to “pursue the connection between art and temperament” (qtd in Caughie 20). Interest in writers’ rooms indicates that readers have not stopped looking for “the Author” or its “hypostases.” Indeed, in the acknowledgements to her scholarly book *The Sense of An Interior: Four Writers and The Rooms that Shaped Them*, which discusses the writing spaces of four authors in relation to their respective concepts of privacy and interiority, Diana Fuss admits that “[t]his book was ... a guilty pleasure, the culmination of a persistent desire to occupy, if only for a moment, the private lives of celebrated authors” (2).

Although it may seem, in the interpretation so far presented of authors’ rooms, that they return to an old-fashioned, highly personal conception of authorship antithetical to Foucault or Barthes’s theories of production, the actual images of the rooms, particularly in *The Guardian*, offer an alternative reading which suggests that in fact these images, as much as texts, in Foucault’s metaphorization, are “creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (142). The photographs also call for an analysis of these authors’ spaces as conspicuously reducing the role of personal authorial presence by displaying a portrait of the room emptied of its human inhabitant rather than a portrait of the author in the room. The absence of the authors in these photographs could be read as a visual depiction of Foucault, Barthes, and Macherey’s authorial theories, which suggest that authorship is defined more by personal absence than by presence. Macherey suggests that “the work exists above all by its determinate absences, by what it does not say, in its relation to what it is not” (193), a statement which might guide a reading of the “portraits” as works in their own right, and might also make a broader comment about the nature of authorship as portrayed in these images. The rooms might be read as containing, and the articles read as exemplifying, a cross-section of the variety of systems of textual “modes of existence. The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each” (Foucault 158). The

author's space could be a microcosmic depiction of the cultural discourses in which he or she is immersed. Writers' rooms, emptied of the writers who possess and occupy them, literalize the notion that as readers, and as viewers of these photographs, "we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" (145).

Architectural and spatial metaphors proliferate in theoretical discourses about authorship, and in shifting the site of construction and arrangement from reader to author, Barthes, for example, retains the notion that a text has an origin of some kind, however composite and however divorced from the person of the author. If a text is "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (136), the bookshelves, scraps, and knickknacks of authors' rooms can be seen to display a literalization and materialization of such originary tissue. Many of the authors in the articles commented on the books on their shelves, although they seldom associated these books directly with their own works. In this sense, far from simple source hunting, visual depictions and verbal descriptions of authors' bookshelves, like their cork bulletin boards, provide much more complicatedly intertextual works. Armitage suggests that "[i]t's all about books, really, and where to put them" (SA par.1), and Vancouver writer Lee Henderson describes his library as "a mix of old and new books. Dictionary. Gaddis's novels. Stuff about Duchamp. The diaries of Joseph Cornell. Popeye. Girard. Bible. Oh, look, there's Shakespeare" (par. 4). The fact that these books exist alongside objects of luck and personal significance creates a polyphonic space, in which, to use Barthes's rhetoric, "a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (38).

An approach to authorship that downplays domesticity and private, isolated authorial conditions can be located not only in the reader of these articles and the viewer of the photographs, but also in some of the authors' comments. Although they are in the minority, a few of the writers featured in these series do not write in personal, individualized rooms at all, but in public libraries, on park benches, on subways, or in rented offices in corporate buildings. Vancouver writer Linda Richards suggests that "I'm not about the place where I write. I'm not about the space ... I'm one of those people: I can write on a plane. I can write in a hotel room, a café. A bus" (par. 9). Teresa McWhirter echoes the sentiment: "It would be really lovely to have a whole room for writing. But all you really need is a pencil" (par. 10). David Chariandy, by contrast, does not find "a whole room for writing" productive or desirable, and prefers public spaces. He works primarily in the Vancouver Public Library: "I need physical distance from my personal life and day-job ... and anonymity in an otherwise social space" (par. 13). The suggestion that anonymity at the stage of writing and composition is desirable relates to some authors' expressions of a desire for privacy. Some of the writers featured in *The Guardian* expressed annoyance at the whole process of having their rooms photographed. Helen Simpson found it "hard to open the door with a smile. This is my private space! Keep out!" (HS par. 1), and while Simon Gray did not mind his space being transgressed, he pre-empted the impulse to judge

the cleanliness of his office: “this is my room and I can do what I bloody like in it” (SG par. 4). Although information on this goes unrecorded, it is likely that there were still other writers who refused to participate in the project. In a response to a BBC article featuring McCabe’s photographs in anticipation of the exhibition at the Madison Gallery, Clive James wrote an article on the relationship between clutter and “pontificating,” and says, after describing his own chaotic and messy office, “I count my blessings that I have not been chosen as one of the subjects for Eamonn McCabe’s series of photographs called Writers’ Rooms” (James par. 5). James had initially suspected and hoped that he would be included in the series, but quickly realized that “even the most shambolic of the writer’s rooms in the photographs was better organised than mine, and the majority of them might have been deliberately arranged to remind me that I myself was working in a skip” (par. 6). James’s is not the only available viewer’s reaction to the series. The selection of writers whose rooms are displayed was expanded in a BBC initiative that invited readers to submit photos of their own creative spaces.

Numerous literary blogs have also reproduced the articles and photographs, often with their own responses, which run from those who have a “slight stalker tendency,” to a more Foucauldian sense that in fact, as reader Sally Crawford commented, seeing the room “was a big step towards demolishing the mystique of ‘the writer’... it’s an office” (par. 1). Several readers were keen to point out similarities between the rooms, often seeking features of an ideally creative or productive space. On “Crooked Brains blog,” a simple list suffices: “One thing we did find common in most of the writers’ rooms: lots of books, some clutter & a computer,” while for the blogger of “Mental\_Floss,” the “Three core elements that appear in virtually all of the rooms are books, clutter, and computers. (A fourth would have to be “comfy chairs,” though I guess that’s common to most rooms in general.) In a surprisingly large subset, the color red is prominent in the room.” To this observation, “Mary” comments: “I’m really amused to find that my own writing space (floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, MacBook, long table, lots of red) is eerily similar ...” The identification of readers of these columns with their own writing or creative spaces is encouraged by the solicitation of their photographs on the BBC website, but is also seemingly a natural product of having this additional access to the writer’s home. The blogger David Haslett reiterates the sense of identification: “As you might expect, some are implausibly tidy, some are well-lived-in . . . and one or two are just like mine!” Sometimes the sense of familiarity is coupled with the notion that remarkable works of literature frequently come from surprisingly unremarkable rooms. A blogger from “Ink Workshop: Notes on Writing and Art” notes: “The photos are fascinating. The workspaces are cozy and ordinary, and I’m struck by the thought that these common tools, the same tools that are available to us all – a squeaky chair, a worn table, something to type on – these tools, used the right way, can produce such uncommon works of art” (“Notebookism” par. 1). The blogger Migilior Acque adds to this sense of mystique that initially surrounds these rooms: “It’s about the space, about an aura of creativity and a recognition of its mystery ... And the space itself has a kind

of creativity, it is a negotiation, something that the occupant, the writer, chips away at over the years. The space is, in a way, another work by the writer” (par.1).

Book historical and materialist approaches to authorship have often focused on post-production manifestations of authorship, which is to say the way in which existing literary works (whether in manuscript or book form) circulate in the world. The Writers’ Rooms columns have gone a step further in their selection and consecration of authors by examining what happens prior to the publication and even composition of the book itself. These might be called the modes of composition – earlier processes that pre-exist modes of production. While much book historical scholarship and bibliographic work goes into describing the processes of printing and producing books, the more ephemeral question of the pre-materiality of contemporary manuscript, typescript, or digital production is less frequently addressed. In a literal sense, the writers’ rooms also enact what Chartier describes as the function of authorship studies. They “reconnect the text with its author ... the author is both dependent and constrained” (51). The desire to “canonize” the writers portrayed in these two columns connects with the desire to preserve these writers’ rooms as a deposit and record of creative production. Portraits of writers’ rooms can augment our readings of various theories of authorship. The writing technologies, the sentimental trinkets, the bookshelves, and the arrangements of the rooms can all be read as telling intertexts for the writers’ works, as personal, intimate spaces that give readers access to authors’ private lives as processes and constructions akin to written work itself, and as evidence for the material production of manuscripts. These are elusive photographs of spaces that embody the creative process, that fetishize and laud authorship while paradoxically removing authors from their own portraits.

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