

AJLS Newsletter

Association for Japanese Literary Studies

No. 29 (Spring, 2009)

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The Eighteenth Annual Meeting Rethinking Gender in the Postgender Era

November 6-8, 2009
Rutgers University

Call for Papers

Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) proposed a three-stage model of the growth of feminist theory, beginning with an androgynist poetics, then a feminist critique and female aesthetic, and finally gender criticism. If feminist theory could but explain gender relations, the promise of eliminating inequality between the sexes seemed within reach. Perhaps contrary to Showalter's expectations, the trajectory of gender studies in the intervening three decades has moved it away from feminist theory and in other directions.

Several forces motivated this shift, including the theoretical focus on gender identity and sexual difference in the 1980s, and the growing perception in the 1990s that gender was also a men's issue. Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex" (1984) rejected the feminist assumption that sexuality is simply derived from gender and argued that gender relations alone could not account for the complexity of sexual behaviors. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* (1990), further identified subversive strategies of gendered performance, such as parody and drag, as central to understanding how

the codes of gender work in creating normative and non-normative identities. The recent postgenderism movement, galvanized by Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), advocates the voluntary rejection of biologically or socially normative sexual and gender identities altogether in favor of an understanding of human fulfillment outside the bounds of the male/female, man/woman binary.

In the context of Japanese literary and visual culture, scholarship on gender reflects a close engagement with these trends and is producing numerous new critical approaches and concepts. Studies have addressed topics such as: literary "intersexuality," defined as representations of ambivalence towards or rejection of categories of sex; the "post-gender" phenomenon of ambiguously gendered or ambiguously sexed bodies in popular media; and narrative constructions of gender as a complex and porous "labyrinth" rather than a simple binary; to name but a few.

This conference begins with a set of questions: How do texts and images work to create gender identities or post-gender alternatives to them, and for

what purposes? How are those gender or postgender identities related to or distinct from sexual, national, ethnic, and other identities? What is the history of these questions we inherit, and how does that history complicate our attempts to address Japanese literary and visual culture? Conversely, what questions has Japanese literary and visual culture raised about gender, and how can they challenge our inherited set of questions?

The 2009 AJLS Conference at Rutgers welcomes proposals that approach gender in innovative ways and examine its relationship to, or intersection with, any issue relevant to Japanese literary and visual culture:

- Femininity and masculinity; their construction, representation, performance
- Female and male authorship
- “Voice” in oral performance, such as *biwa hōshi*, *ningyō jōruri*, kabuki, etc.
- Readership; who reads what, and why
- Escaping the limitations of gender binary: gender bending, gender blending, postgenderism
- Literary genres: travel diaries, detective fiction, etc.
- Media analysis: film, theater, and anime
- Race and ethnicity
- Rhetoric and ideology of nationalism, including the production of national language
- Rhetoric of desire (for example, within the triangular relationship as described by René Girard)
- Construction of pre-modern or modern subjectivities and identities
- Normative and non-normative sexualities
- Place, space, landscape
- Japan and Japaneseness
- Diaspora

Papers and panels are especially welcome that address the life and literary

legacy of Oba Minako (1930-2007).

Deadline is June 1, 2009 for receipt of abstracts of no more than 250 words on these and other questions. We welcome individual submissions as well as three- or four-person panel proposals. Abstracts should be submitted by e-mail attachment and must include the presenter’s name, institutional affiliation, and e-mail address. (You may use the proposal form included in the electronic version of our newsletter). In the case of panel proposals, the organizer of the panel should send a cover sheet briefly explaining the panel’s unifying rationale along with the abstracts for each paper and the name of a chair and a discussant. Presentations will be organized in 1½-hour time blocks. The conference languages are English and Japanese.

Proposals should be submitted to: ajls2009.rutgers@gmail.com

All other correspondence may be directed to the organizers: Paul Schalow (schalow@rci.rutgers.edu) or Janet Walker (jwalk@rci.rutgers.edu)

2007 Meeting Report

The seventeenth annual meeting of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies was held at The University of British Columbia on August 19-21, 2008—the first such meeting in Canada. The theme of the conference was “Parody” and featured a total of forty papers, and a keynote address by Prof. Noriko Yamashita (Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan) on “Edo-period *Mitate* and Parody.” Presentations included organized panels on “Writing Parody in Meiji Japan,” “Provoking Parodies in Edo Literature, Drama, and Public Storytelling,” “Verbal/Visual Parody Interplays in Late Edo-period Woodblock Prints,” and “Murdering the Original—Corpses and Translations in Modern Japanese Literature.” As can be seen, presenters considered parody in

both visual and written texts. Participants came from half a dozen countries, including Austria, Italy, and Japan. Twenty-seven of the papers considered modern Japan, twelve Edo, and only one the Heian period. There was lively discussion on the various theoretical approaches to the related concepts of parody, pastiche, *mitate*, and *yatsushi*. An exhibition, "Juxtaposition (*Mitate*) and Slumming (*Yatsushi*) in Early Modern Japanese Culture," curated by Joshua Mostow, was on display in the Asian Library and included an illustrated catalogue in the form of a *sugoroku* board-game.

We anticipate a thought-provoking and valuable proceedings volume. Presenters are reminded that the final deadline for submission of their papers is February 1, 2009.

The conference was co-hosted by Professors Sharalyn Orbaugh and Joshua Mostow. It was supported by the Toshiba International Foundation and Japan Foundation, and was recognized as an official event in the celebration of the 80th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Canada and Japan.

Cooperation with ATJ?

We have been contacted by the ATJ Board and officers, who seek a cooperative arrangement with AJLS. They are interested in a membership arrangement—by offering AJLS members membership in ATJ or by creating a sort of "joint membership" which members of both associations might be able to take advantage of. They also want more ideas from our members to encourage literature specialists' contributions to their journal and participation in their annual seminar. Please come to our business meeting to be held in conjunction with the AAS meeting (Friday, March 27, 7-9 p.m. at Parlor F) to dis-

cuss this matter (some ATJ officers plan to join us and explain their request). If you have suggestions regarding this, please also email me at: ese-kine@purdue.edu.

AJLS Membership

The annual fee is \$25.00 for regular, student, and institution members (\$35.00 for overseas members outside North America). Membership provides you with:

- Panel participation for our annual meeting (if your proposal is selected).
- Two newsletters
- One copy of our latest proceedings.
- One free copy of a back or additional current issue of the proceedings if you are a student member.

Inquiries and orders (with checks payable to AJLS) should be sent to the AJLS office. For further information visit our website.

Yale University for 2010 Host

Yale University will host our 2010 conference. If you are interested in hosting an AJLS meeting for 2011 or later, please contact Professor Ann Sherif: ann.sherif@oberlin.edu or 440-775-8827.

New Proceedings / Back Issues

The new issue of our proceedings, *Literature and Literary Theory* (PAJLS, vol. 9), will be published shortly. More information on this issue will be posted on the *jlit-l* mailing list, as well as on our website. The following PAJLS back issues are available (See our website for their tables of contents). Each copy is \$10.00 for AJLS members and \$15.00 for non-members. Orders should be sent to the AJLS office. (Add \$15 for mailing if you order from outside the North American area.)

Issues of Canonicity and Canon For-

mation in Japanese Literary Studies
PAJLS, vol. 1: vi, 532 pp., 2000.

Acts of Writing, PAJLS, vol. 2: ix, 428 pp., 2001.

Japan from Somewhere Else, PAJLS, vol. 3: vi, 158 pp., 2002.

Japanese Poeticity and Narrativity Revisited, PAJLS, vol. 4: vi, 344 pp., 2003.

Hermeneutical Strategies, PAJLS, vol. 5: xiii, 517 pp., 2004.

Landscapes Imagined and Remembered, PAJLS, vol. 6: vii, 215 pp., 2005.

Reading Material, PAJLS, vol. 7: xiii, 149 pp., 2006.

Travel in Japanese Representational Culture, PAJLS, vol. 8: viii, 498 pp., 2007.

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