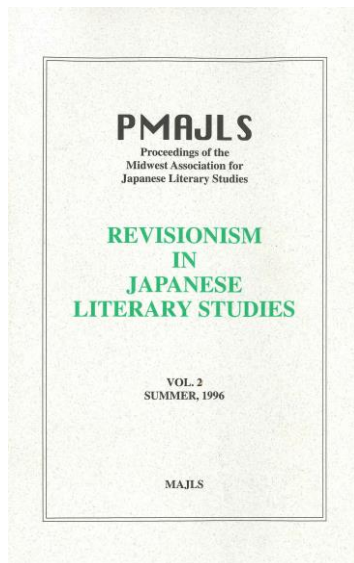


“Feminism and Sexuality: A Commentary by
Discussant”

John R. Wallace 

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**FEMINISM AND SEXUALITY:
A COMMENTARY BY DISCUSSANT**

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What follows is a close approximation to my comments made following the presentation of papers. I have decided not to add to or delete from those comments except to clarify a statement here and there. (Note: Only comments regarding papers published in this volume are included.)

James Stanlaw's "'Tangled Hair' on a 'Bad Hair Day': Feminist Tresses, Marxist Practices, and Ethnopoetics in the Writings of Yosano Akiko and Tawara Machi"

I have always enjoyed listening to Professor Stanlaw's papers because of the freshness of his approach.

A couple of important things come out of this paper.

First, In his approach Professor Stanlaw has illustrated for us very nicely what (borrowing from Freud) we could call the "over-determinacy" of a text. Being over-determined, a good text will exceed the effort of the critique to capture it. It is the portion that escapes our effort rather than what we have "tamed" by analysis that holds my fascination and love. (And, yes, this is surely a "gendered" claim.) We try to understand, we do understand—and there is pleasure in this, too—but time passes and we begin to wonder again if indeed we understood as we would like to understand.

Second, I think Professor Stanlaw has found, for him [and that is who counts], another way to read with pleasure. To me this is the essence of theory: not to theorize in order to define or determine, but rather to organize, channel—make conscious if you wish—one's own passions and desires. For me this finding a way to read with pleasure is close to a pure joy. But it is even nicer [as in today's talk] if it turns out to stimulate someone else's reading. Yet I think the critic needs to be aware always of how he or she is taking a position between a reader and a text, and that sometimes, as when two of one's friends seem to be falling in love, it is best just to excuse oneself and leave the scene.

Eiji Sekine's "A Genealogy of Modern Love Stories: From *Snow Country* through *Norwegian Wood*"

For me, two of the most stimulating ideas in this paper are as follows:

First, I think Professor Sekine has illustrated very nicely the polymorphic nature of sexuality. This was indeed one of Freud's true insights and yet it still hasn't settled down sufficiently or widely in intellectual discourse. I often sense that when the presence of sexuality in a text is felt as a problem it frequently evokes what is essentially a discursive desire to reduce its threat (to the stability of meaning within discourse) by naming it, fixing it in a place, rather than allowing it to do its chameleon thing. Thus I am delighted to read sentences like, from the conclusion, "What I am saying is that things are more complex and transgendered" (emphasis mine) because, for one thing, this presents gender as a process rather than an essence. This, to my mind, is simply a more honest and fruitful, if difficult, direction of thought.

Also, Professor Sekine has a way of phrasing things just exactly right. For example, he wrote, "A modern male pursues the ultimate woman in order for him to attain the conclusive meaning of sexuality, and life." This is getting almost too honest for me, a man, to read—it is very revealing, and gives me a sensation of unwanted nakedness. The word choice "conclusive" is just great: concluding, that is, putting an end to nagging, anxiety-producing desire that seeks to extinguish itself only through a peak experience.