

Corpi, Murakami, and Contemporary Hardboiled Fiction

Cathy Steblyk  
*Pennsylvania State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Steblyk, Cathy. "Corpi, Murakami, and Contemporary Hardboiled Fiction." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 5.2 (2003): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1187>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1187)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 5 Issue 2 (June 2003) Article 3**

**Cathy Steblyk,**

**"Corpi, Murakami, and Contemporary Hardboiled Fiction"**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol5/iss2/3>>

---

**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 5.2 (2003)**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol5/iss2>>

---

**Abstract:** In her paper, "Corpi, Murakami, and Contemporary Hardboiled Fiction," Cathy Steblyk discusses comparatively texts by contemporary detective fiction writers, one an ethnic-minority US-American and the other Japanese. Steblyk proposes that in detective fiction since the late 1980s, morally or ethically contestable sites of history have been given a postmortem by contemporary authors who are interested in restoring the lost parts of cultural histories. Detective fictions by feminist US-Chicana author Lucha Corpi and Japanese writer Murakami Haruki show how recent fiction from around the globe uses the hardboiled genre for the purposes of exploring past injustices and offering revisionist histories. The authors isolate crimes of mis-representation, interpret "historical fact" both analytically and empathetically, and act as a social vehicle of change. Steblyk finds that these recent detective fictions suggest, in an unexpectedly modernist way, a review of historical cultural narratives in order to redress history. By using the elements of the hardboiled in part against itself -- similar to other recent neo-modernist authors of hardboiled fiction -- Corpi's and Murakami's texts offer a metacritical commentary on detection in order to show how knowledge (crime) is produced. By placing themselves self-consciously in text, these contemporary fictions open up narratives and retrieve other bodies lost to certain legitimated, patriarchal, imperialist, cultural, or social histories.

---

## Cathy Steblyk

### Corpi, Murakami, and Contemporary Hardboiled Fiction

The "theft" of history is, it seems, a common crime in recent hardboiled fiction. Particularly since the late 1980s, morally or ethically contestable sites of history have been given a postmortem by authors in order to re-examine previously accepted reports of past events. In this context, the hardboiled detective genre is being used, in an unexpectedly modernist way, by contemporary writers all over the world as a means to review historical cultural narratives, to isolate crimes of mis-representation, and to act as a social vehicle of change. Diagnosis, self-discovery, and interpretation were watchwords of early twentieth-century modernities: it is apt that an era interested in such endeavors as laboratory-based investigation, Freudian psychoanalysis, the operations of language, and the construction of meaning would also see the rise of realist-based, fact-finding, fictional sleuthing. The detective fiction produced in this early twentieth-century historical formation offered an investigation that depended heavily on the reasoning faculties of the individual, the modern cognitive subject. Modernist detection, in this framing, demonstrated the individual's attempt to make sense of the world around him, and the confidence that, through reason, one could achieve an epistemological and metaphysical determining of self and Other, wrong and right, in the world. It may be surprising, then, given the commitment to epistemological, even moral, relativity among postmodernist texts, that recent hardboileds have shown a somewhat modernist faith in detection, and have engaged in an ethical project of social transformation through subversive re-examinations of history. This paper examines how recent hardboiled fiction by contemporary writers, such as in texts by a Chicana American Lucha Corpi and those the Japanese author, Murakami Haruki, exemplify a current international trend that deploys the analytic methodology of the modern detective genre and simultaneously undermines it in order to open an originary text, namely history.

Corpi and Murakami have stolen back, in fact, a generic blueprint. Re-writing was offered, like a prescient clue, by the master of detective fiction himself, Edgar Allen Poe, in his famous story of 1845, "The Purloined Letter." Opening with a quote by Seneca, "Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio," Poe's becomes a generic ur-text of narrative self-consciousness and doubling back on itself, as the long line of studies by Jacques Lacan (1956), Jacques Derrida (1975), Barbara Johnson (1980), John Irwin (1994), and Joel Black (1999) among others also has shown. The first theft is performed by the Minister, who steals a Queen's compromising letter in front of the King (who sees nothing), leaves a duplicate, and thus establishes his power to blackmail the Queen. The police, stymied, tell C. Auguste Dupin of the theft. The second theft is committed by Dupin, who, while the unintuitive police "see nothing" though they have the clues, steals back the Queen's letter, leaving a replacement in the Minister's study while his back is turned. Dupin's success, as well as his ultimate vengeance for a former crime committed against him by the Minister, is recounted by the narrator, Dupin's assistant. This operation would have little impact if emphasis were placed only on the mathematical shift. However, the generic blueprint is epistemologically loaded. Lacan's tri-partite structural reading of Poe's tale of ratiocination would find significance in the contained symbolic circuit of the letter. Then, in Derrida's quadrangular reading, meaning is attached to the letter's written content, namely the vengeful witticism Dupin pens on his replacement in a hand the Minister is sure to recognize. These paradigmatic readings are joined subsequently by various other interpretations, and one begins to understand, then, that beyond solving the present crime, Dupin and all subsequent critics (!) avenge themselves of an earlier crime (a narrative, an interpretation) by using the structure and changing its meaning, leading to a diegetic chain of revenge uncontained by the narrative. By emphasizing the content of the letter, Lacan's three thus becomes Derrida's four, but neither of these numerical readings will prove satisfactory for subsequent readers of Poe's story. Johnson and other recent analysts of "The Purloined Letter," seeing "five" on the horizon, have preferred to end the interpretive act of the crime story with a critical aporia. While recognizing the theft-narrative's methodological self-

consciousness, these critics refuse to reduplicate the un-ending interpretive act of one-upmanship begun between Dupin and the Minister (and continued by Lacan and Derrida). See how the text is left open. Rather than re-reading the purloined letter again, it is precisely at this point in the poststructuralist debate outlined above that present post/modern hardboileds step in, recognize the epistemological limitations of both ratiocination and relativism, and "steal" history.

In other words, the detective genre's critical history itself may be read in tandem with the twentieth-century investigation into "meaning", moving from an emphasis placed on objective realism to structuralism, to the dichotomous structures of poststructuralism and deconstructionism, and finally to the incommensurability of postmodern play and parody. However much the texts examined here open texts of the past and self-consciously remain open to future texts, though, the play that one might expect of postmodern texts is partly absent. In such texts as Corpi's *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992) and Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (*Nejimakidori koroniku* 1994-95; trans. Jay Rubin 1997), readers find that the psychological edge that produced the characteristic disenchantment of early modernist hardboiled texts is still present. There is a lingering distrust of contemporary corporate or bourgeois or government cultures that allows for an ethical revolt. On the one hand, in this way the texts of these contemporary authors have a precursor in such racially revisionist, modernist hardboiled fictions of Chester Himes, with his portrayals of African Americans, the poor and the dispossessed presented in street-wise narratives set in black Harlem in the 1950s. However, even while the recent texts show a postmodern lack of faith in a single secure meaning, these neo-modernist fictions are not morally ambivalent, showing an uneasy faith in our social systems upon which they must ultimately rely for their various programs of recognition and social change. Corpi takes on the Chicano Rights movement, farm slave labor, and institutional corruption in California in the seventies in her engagement with history. Murakami takes on Japan's historical erasure of the Manchurian holocaust during the second Sino-Japanese conflict of 1937-42 from its collective memory. As demonstrated with the purloined letter, the implicit position recent hardboileds take vis-à-vis the traditional detective narrative and, by implication, cultural narratives and accepted histories of events, lies in the cumulative effect of text on text that does not end in closure. In addition to the doubling narrative, the contemporary hardboileds enact both a vengeful, witty joke and subvert the original naïve realism of classical detection/history, inserting alternative meanings, ontological standpoints, and reformative narratives of events while deploying the classical form's strategies. This archeological re-examination of the patriarchal, colonialist, and imperialist certainties previously endorsed by modern histories and prevalent in the male-centered universe of classical detective fiction operates chimerically both on and against traditional modern detection and sense-making strategies.

The works of Lucha Corpi, a Chicana writer and activist, which include *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992), *Cactus Blood* (1995), and *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999), are remarkable not only for their individualist feminist hero but also for their engagement with social issues and protest. Chicana/o and Californian politics, demonstrations, riots, tear-gassing, and, of course, murder, bleed over the crime scenes of Corpi's texts, whose detective Gloria Damasco is a spirit-sensing clairvoyant with a child. Aided by her mother and good friends as well as her detective lover/partner, Damasco solves crimes that involve the Chicano civil rights movements, the 1970's riots, environmental poisonings, Mexican slave labor, racial tensions, mental disorders, poisonous medications, rape, spousal abuse, shamanism, and Mexican mythology. Corpi plants these alternative cultural experiences in the midst of the certitudes and conventional national "American" histories that made up both the narrative and background world of California from the mid- to late-twentieth century. The epigraph of *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*, a quotation from José E. Montoya's poem "Garbanzo Beret," for example, signals immediately Corpi's historical intervention in written history: "Down Whittier, La Raza marched/To protest against the government./Fists raised, in one voice/they all chanted: Power to the Chicano!//Laguna Park looked like a fairground,/A celebration of color/Who would have thought that an afternoon/of love would later turn to horror" (*Eulogy*, Preface). In the next few pages, a boy

Michael is found dead in the streets in the aftermath of this same 1970 Chicano march in Los Angeles. Like the mental visions Damasco sees and credits as she attempts to solve the death of this Chicano child, Corpi foregrounds impossible texts, namely the historical, psychological, and social texts of alterity and otherness. She creates a complex network of economic, political and racial relations against which her detective reveals and solves more than a crime. From the milieu of silencing, objective historical narratives comes this racially marked scream. A central concern of Corpi's texts remains a doggedly political, engaged iteration of the identity of individuals who have been left for dead, and who are bound to a collective Chicana/o identity and Mexican history.

Corpi's series hints of conspiracy and oppression, particularly of "The Man" who erases Chicana/o experience at the time and then in the history books. She poses a narrative challenge to reposition the ethnic and racial Other in time, space, and history. Joined on the one hand by feminist authors such as Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton, Katherine V. Forrest, Janet Dawson, Laurie King, and Janet Evanovich, Corpi's hardboiled fiction is cemented on the other hand by the works of Rolando Hinojosa, Manuel Ramos, and other Chicano/a authors contributing to a provocative yet under-explored genre of fictional/biographical detection of cultural identity, "legal" history, colonial politics, gender roles, and race in America. Injustice is examined and interrogated by Corpi in ways that highlight its interconnectedness to forms of authority, that is, to legal and corporate institutions that can either perpetuate or ameliorate racial tensions. When Gloria muses on the black and white nature, ironically, of moral questions in a tense racial environment, she states that "the dilemma in which I found myself had no easy solutions" (*Eulogy* 62). Highlighting the complex nature of race politics traced over the course of a changing history, she makes a non-Chicano police friend, Kenyon, and involves him and her close friend, Luisa, two people who might otherwise have represented opposing sides at one point, in the progress of her investigation and thus in the process of mutual acknowledgement. History has already been unjust in its elision of the death of Michael from accounts: Damasco's investigation occurs in the network of racial tensions developed over eighteen years in which she also plays a part: "In the summer of 1970 everything anyone of us did had to be considered according to its political impact on the Chicano community. So Luisa and I supported the unwritten rule that forbade Chicanos to go public on any issues that could be used to justify discrimination against us. In some ways, I realized our movement for racial equality and self-determination was no different than others like it in other parts of the world. But we were a people within a nation. Our behavior was constantly under scrutiny, our culture relentlessly under siege" (*Eulogy* 64). Although occasionally nostalgic for what might appear to be a history of relatively uncomplicated, oppositional politics of oppression and resistance in the 1960s, Corpi's narratives also face down the complex, contradictory, and even divisive politics of the present-day Chicano movement itself, of the issues of class and ideological difference of identity politics. Gloria strives to reconcile opposing forces and bring justice in her murder investigation while her culture is simultaneously under siege and yet being built from both within and without the Chicano community. Corpi has a personal vision of social activism that credits earlier attempts at Chicano redress and builds on this history. Like the detective of the eighteen-year-old murder investigation above, the protagonist of *Cactus Blood* goes back in time to revisit the site of a 1973 United Farm Workers Strike and Grape Boycott. Remembering when "thousands of farm workers had ended up in jail", when "Luisa, Dario and I [Gloria] had witnessed first-hand the deputies' brutality" (*Cactus* 8), Gloria reiterates a forgotten pesticide poisoning and rape of a young exploited Mexican woman named Carlota. Carlota seems intricately linked, in turn, to the present-day death of Sonny, an activist in both recent and earlier Chicano movements. Corpi deploys the genre's ideologically conservative conventions, namely to re-establish social norms. But at the same time, she brings justice to the victims of racially- (or economically- or ethnically-) linked crimes not through retelling the same history, but rather through the metaphors of detection that allow for holes in the generic epistemological armor. By acknowledging the experiences of the systemically abused and oppressed, by using her mental imaging powers, and by empathetically seeing the ties between

present and past Chicano history, Corpi's texts radically transform a genre that has relied on the tenets of patriarchal structures, objective knowledge and factual proof.

Unlike traditional detection, Corpi's texts legitimate certain threads of non-patriarchal, non-capitalist, and non-dominant history. And when the individual and communal readers' own role in racial politics and the perpetuation of abuse, either actively or in ignorance, is made clear, not only are individuals found culpable of the narrated murder, but also a (real) society understands its own culpability in the crimes against migrant/alien workers of racial and other exploitation. Showing the blood on the readers' own hands, Corpi goes back in time in order to re-write history and also to bring us forward to the possibility of ethical change. From the narrative worlds of undocumented experiences, Corpi's texts erect a social structure to rebuild history. By connecting the past to the present in the movement, Corpi's texts also revitalize the contemporary Chicano activist consciousness. Corpi is not held to revisiting the master narrative of dominant social, materialist history: Corpi reviews concepts of knowing as well as of justice in her work. *Cactus Blood*, *Black Widow's Wardrobe*, and *Eulogy* each contain culminating moments of compressed mythical time and mental/mystical connections between events and people. For instance, the Black Widow is seen entering a house though Gloria says she has been dead for a year (192), and at least twice Gloria sees or hears her daughter Tania's face or voice as if present, once in connection with a life-threatening gunfight (*Cactus* 228), and again in connection with a vision of the now-dead Luisa (*Eulogy* 189). These and similar paranormal instances of seeing and knowing are in direct opposition to traditional modern specular epistemologies. Corpi equally credits and acknowledges alternative ways of knowing, demonstrating the possibility of other subjective knowledges acting in concert with observable "fact." With Corpi's texts, it is clear that the effects of crime, and the forms criminality takes, pervade all strata of society. Moreover, individual crimes as well as traumatizing events are seen in psychical and material connection in an indexical relation, that is, with the effect that single or initial incidents be re-evaluated in light of their wider relations or implications over time or over people. Gloria can be described as a medium, in this sense, who translates injustice from the spiritual world (usually of the dead or disenfranchised) to the physical, material (real) world, and, in doing so, becomes an agent of the expression of pain and a conduit to bring justice to those ignored. Corpi's texts as such also feature a detective who operates outside the strictures of "legal" society, one is an advocate for those lacking conventional access to "legal," institutionalized power or who are the invisible objects of systemic oppression.

The classical detective genre, through pseudo-objective strategies, has reinforced traditionally or restated historical, patriarchal, normalized values, ethics, and facts. A transgression is committed, a murder is investigated, a crime is solved, punishment ensues, and social order is restored. This persuasive epistemology of detection, as with other modes of modernity, some times has been complicated, of course, by the genre's own interpretive self-consciousness and occasional sense of failure, exemplified par excellence in the critical film noir of the 1940s. Although the detective genre has been self-reflexive since Balzac, Poe, and Marlowe, it has supported still the health of patriarchal structures as well as maintained a humanist faith in the faculties of reason and decipherability. The postmodern/neo-modernist fictions studied here are textual and critical, but they are also simultaneously meta-textual and meta-critical, relying on interpretive acts which argue against the traditional detective narrative itself, its own generic history, and its faith in social maps, visibility, and proofs. The textual self-consciousness of Corpi is apparent and, particularly in Murakami's work as we shall see, involves an additional porousness of meaning's variety and unaccountability. With both authors studied here, subjective knowledge, labyrinthine pluralities of identity, generically subversive interventions and epistemologies, and even disappearances or non-appearances of key characters generically, actions, and stories stop up the generic gum-shoe machine. Recent hardboiled deliberately seek out absent bodies and lost narratives, thus showing the fallible epistemologies of detection and, by implication, history. Modern texts offered a corpse or letter and trusted the sleuth's



capacity to determine how it became one. Although at times execrable and contradictory himself, the detective of yore discovered the meaning of a corpse/a letter and restored social order, often realized in the absolute terms of a previously innocent past, black and white (of course, the genres of film noir and hardboiled fiction are also a critique of bourgeois society and of the classical detective genre's absolutism and innocence. However, even if the classical hardboiled is itself in search of meaning rather than a specific criminal, the oppositional mechanisms of its detection more closely align with modernist strategies than with postmodern ontological or metaphysical questions). Generic clues present in modern texts lead us to expect a reconnaissance through a Lacanian *méconnaissance*, or mis-identification with the spectral Other "punished," in a sense, through the detective's active part in demystification. The classical or traditional detective will perform a synthesis of antinomies, further, of the Cartesian mind/body split by piecing together or affirming the clues to others' or its own existence.

In contrast, as one sees in the present study, the forgotten and ungovernable bodies elided in traditional hardboileds are foregrounded and left "unpunished." In other words, the repressed, no longer symbolically just another stiff, is voiced. Like the result of Dupin's sleight of hand with the letter and his own text, the decentering texts of otherness and minorities written by Corpi and Murakami are legitimated and provocatively inserted into the wider circulation of authoritative texts. And as we have seen with the purloined letter, writing what was formerly repressed will call for a response, just as the Other narrative asserts and avenges itself on the dominant former text. Unlike the modernist investment in truth, justice, and binary opposition, however, the door on the humanist enterprise of traditional detection is now left open: identity is no longer absolute; performance, subjectivity, relativity, and empathy prevail, or are at least possible, present, even menacing. As we discover in the recent hardboileds, historical questions are introduced and traditional epistemologies undermined while knowledge does not rest on the masculinist paradigm of single truth. These texts are ethical in their act of re-opening the text and in their political engagement of discursive instability, of the purloined history in the re-telling, not only in its content per se.

In the work of Murakami, plenitude, ambivalence, and parody are the rule. While Corpi's hardboileds pivot on inversion, on transgressive narrative, on oppositional identity, and the introduction of alien Otherness, Murakami's texts in comparison are perched not on the edge of one or another (not so lucid) truth, but rather in ambiguity, as I show in an analysis of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Against the traditional drive of the return to the social order is the sense here that there is neither margin nor center, no division of physical or mental world, nor even legitimate narrative, in this work. Representation through a variety of narratives is reality. Here the porous ontologies of the fantastic and science fiction that prevail in this Japanese text are more extreme than those of the other hardboileds studied, and even more at metaphysical odds with modernist certainties. At the self-conscious extreme of modernist metaphor and meaning, postmodern metaphysical hardboileds such as Murakami's revel in a hermeneutic, and often hermetic, multiply signifying chaos/cosmos. In the absence of absolutism, metaphysical postmodern detective stories employ typically, subvert, and parody classical narrative structures of detection, including those of determinism and closure. Joel Black, reading such metaphysical fictions as Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, raises even the elemental issue of communication, for example, which is thwarted between characters and in the narrative worlds of the postmodern text. "In the postmodern era, simple acts of verbal communication, let alone textual interpretation, prove a good deal more daunting than Dupin's stupendous feats of detection" (94). In Murakami's fiction, out most basic assumptions of speaking, meaning, being, and knowing, nested in the symbolic order of language along with subjectivity, are questioned along with "Whodunnit." Even "clues" become eristic signifiers, and signifieds spurious metaphors of knowing/lack, despite an existing system. The postmodern protagonist's inability to decode the clues, even to his or her own existence, or to determine anything, is reflected by the reader's effort to make sense of the text, in turn mirroring our confounded attempt to make absolute sense of reality.

Let us return to the scene of the crime. At once, Murakami's work draws heavily on hardboiled's structural elements, and draws attention to itself in its own production of meaning in the self-conscious act of a search. At the same time, Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* lacks a traditional victim or corpse as well as any notion of the subject we generically expect of classical hardboiled detection. In this chronicle, then, we have two cases simultaneously: namely one, of the missing body (lack of subject/identity); and two, of the missing text (lack of the original, chronicle, history, chronograph in an over-saturated media culture). And here only begin the mysteries. In the first case of the missing body, the theft/murder of Kumiko Okada's individual identity -- the psychic nut as well as the body, apparently -- immediately ruptures the generic chalk-marks one expects of the traditional crime scene. The "possible" here breaks the boundary of "real" in the theft through psycho-sexual rape perpetrated by a malevolent media idol, Kumiko's brother Noboru Wataya. His violent influence over her and others operates through an abstract Machiavellian relation between him and all others in his sphere, involving his manipulation of public desire realized through the media which he also controls. Essentially (irony intended), he attacks each person's individual, material, sexual, and psychological vulnerability, their core. After the initial break, when Kumiko is lost to her home, then found, but continues to disappear, she repeatedly asks her husband, Tôru Okada, to "say my name." He is in the process of losing her to her own mental darkness, metaphorically-yet-really presented in the novel as the interior of a labyrinthine hotel and room 208, that is, the physical manifestation of the mental sucking machine of his brother-in-law, Noboru.

The difficulty of hailing, that is, naming or knowing something or someone, is played on in multiple ways: with May Kasuhara's naming Tôru Okada "Mr. Wind-up Bird;" with Malta Kano's crank phone calls when she says her name and nothing else; in Malta and Creta Kano's re-naming of themselves after beautiful Greek islands; in Tôru's epithets for the mother and son he names "Akasaka Nutmeg" and "Akasaka Cinnamon" after the place of their encounter. As signaled by the loose and ineffectual strategy of trying to call something into existence through naming, as no certain thing appears, the modernist project of identity bankrupts, and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* becomes a search for meaning and core identity failed. Ewert notes that "metaphysical detection is a genre predicated on the unpredictability of evil in a world where the rules are obscure and failure is fatal" (192). Here, not only is evil unpredictable, as Noboru is the personification of the malevolent force of a media-saturated culture erasing essential identity in an indeterminable world. But also the game is indecipherable, though messages, such as the power of desire and false media, are intermittently, brokenly transmitted. In this aleatory world of rule-breaking and failure of identity, can there yet remain an ethical project in Murakami's fiction? Noboru personifies quite essentially the return of the repressed, by tickling desire, stealing the core identities of women, and leaving them without a self. Tôru is also called upon by Nutmeg and Cinnamon to help restore lost identities, through spiritual means, to women who've lost themselves, and regain identity by touching the scar that appeared on Tôru's face when Kumiko's cat disappeared just as she did. Creta Kano, another peripheral character who also dabbles in the psychic realm, enlists Tôru's help with her sister Malta Kano, who is deprived of a self also through a violent sexual encounter with Noboru. Tôru, though by no means Noboru's equal, is consistently called upon for salvation, and thus, in this sense, we are encouraged by what appears to be a traditional structuring of opposites, good and evil. Our generic impulse is to read for the restoration of order made possible through Tôru's actions, but the protagonist Tôru is never a hero of outstanding intellect, acts, strength or personality. Even his name is commonplace and undistinguished. Tôru searches for his wife's cat, then his wife, and even his own identity/unconscious, though all his searches take place with a striking amount of ambivalence and urgency. His own search for self is occasioned when he literally stumbles across an old well, periodically goes down into it, and finally reaches "enlightenment" or some level of psychic integration when he is deliberately interred there by May, his precocious teenage neighbor. Murakami engages the reader's engine of ratiocination through a simultaneous offering of two what-seem-to-be-key texts, namely those of modern



psychoanalysis and of the modern detective genre. The modernist impulse toward integration, however, is never quite realized as a drive here, but an ambivalent, even irritating --should the epistemological impulse hold sway--, meandering that ultimately only proves here that knowledge is never absolute. The objects of both searches, for psychic integration and for a solution to the disappearance, remain simultaneously illusory, open, unresolved, or dismissible.

This loss of the subject and singular identity in a permeable text is characteristic of other metaphysical detection in works by Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Auster, Eco, and Perec, to name but a few. As in these similar narratives of the failed search for the subject, then, detection and disclosure may reveal only relative subjectivity and relative success. This uneasy resolution of identity in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is joined, moreover, by the problem of "case two" mentioned earlier, namely that of the missing text, the original chronicle, the history, the chronograph. The progressive, somewhat linear, search narrative described above is over-written by Tôru's lateral encounters with the psychic medium and her prostitute sister, namely Creta and Malta Kano, with the female sixteen-year-old misfit May who indirectly killed her boyfriend, and with the mother/son couple of psycho-therapist entrepreneurs, Nutmeg and Cinnamon. After we have followed Tôru two-thirds through this social maze, however, we witness generically the most subversive aspect, namely the sublation of this detection as another text is introduced, that is Toru's own story he accidentally encounters on Cinnamon's computer and surreptitiously returns to review as if he were analyzing a text. In this marriage of ontological and epistemological uncertainty between the narrative strands of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, chaos becomes the norm as true detection, true reality, and the true subject are sent up as representation and narrative.

What are the philosophical implications of this absence of a signifying stiff, a material body independent of the texts's own fictions, a "legitimated" crime to investigate, an impermeable discourse? In direct contrast to modernist detection, Murakami's postmodern texts consistently demonstrate the ambivalence of truth through a sub-textual query of mental landscape and physical reality, clogging the generic engine of ratiocination even while the highly ocular-based strategies of traditional detection are deployed (similar texts by Murakami are *Hitsuji o meguru bôken* [1982; trans. *A Wild Sheep Chase*, 1989] and *Sekai no owari to hâdo-boirudo wandârando* [1985; trans. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of the World*, 1991]). *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* asks iconoclastic questions that become deadly, given the textual medium: Is knowledge possible, or even valuable? What is the nature of knowing? What is real? And, what is the nature of identity? What is the subject? What is narrative?

Patricia Merivale and Susan Sweeney link the "fabulous symbols, elaborate ironies, incongruous juxtapositions and self-reflexive pastiche" of the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets to this type of postmodern metaphysical detection. They add that recent fiction, moreover, "is composed of equal parts parody, paradox, epistemological allegory (nothing can be known with any certainty), and insoluble mystery," and that these stories "self-consciously question the very nature of reality" (4). In other words, insolubility, anathema to modernists, is the bread and butter of metaphysical hardboileds. Or, as Joseph Natoli states of other metaphysical detection: "It's a ride for the hell of it -- a ride that we have to take, that we may think we're not taking but we're taking nonetheless. It's an unraveling, deconstructive journey -- a nomadic wandering that has no clear beginning or end. One person's exit is another person's entrance ... We connect with the extreme precariousness and arbitrariness of connecting. We pursue one thread of sense into another... And parody the sense that comes out of the part we play" (146). In this ride for the hell of it, interpretation may not tell us much. Confrontation and convolution characterize the visual spaces we are asked to travel in the alleys, wells, streets and hotels of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, where sight, positivistic interpretation, and identification are compromised. Murakami's bumbling operative is a Japanese existentialist hero similar to Abe Kôbo's repertoire of faceless protagonists in *Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no onna*, 1960), *The Ruined Map* (*Moyetsukita chizu*, 1967), and *The Box Man* (*Hakootoko*, 1973), guilty by implication

and threatened with his own sense of loss of identity in the hands of the system. However self-conscious, Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* also stands noticeably apart from these modernist texts because reality is a series of endless, proliferating stories deconstructing detection by sabotaging its own embedded text of the detection itself. As Natoli finds, "things were a far sight less messy with the modernist noir where some reality stuff on the periphery had broken loose and threatened to decenter us" (146).

As we have seen with Corpi, Murakami demonstrates how his ethical project is to show us, rather than tell us, how contemporary societies lose sight of their own histories. As he corrupts the epistemological narrative, we seem to move further away from the possibility of ethical inquiry, but Noboru yet represents a spectral presence of the loss of moral values and ethical conscience in the ignorant slough created by banal mass media in contemporary Japanese society. It would seem that Noboru and evil are vanquished by Tôru as he ultimately beats a mysterious presence with a bat in the hotel, and seems to save Kumiko, when the external spectre of Noboru apparently falls ill. This violence with the bat is presaged by Tôru's possession of a bat in the well, by his beating of an anonymous Tokyo man, as well as in the tale told by a Japanese soldier to Akasaka Nutmeg's father during the Manchurian conflict. In this last account, Nutmeg's father heard how a soldier witnessed a man clubbed to death with a baseball bat used by the Chinese to play and then to kill him. Through Murakami's vision of time, the instrument becomes a symbol of the irrationality and banality of evil. If we ultimately are left uncertain of success, or of Kumiko's restoration to Tôru's side, we also understand that all evil events and instruments also will not go away, which is the text's ethical and moral stake in an otherwise self-denying narrative. However relative the "real", the diagnostic subtext that underlies all these proliferating threads is Murakami's simultaneous, unflinching examination of a military bloodbath, namely Japan's forgotten fifteen-year campaign in China in the 1930s, the Manchurian war and the Battle of Nomonhan, as I will show.

The character Honda is a war veteran of the Manchukuo (Manchurian) holocaust, a personal friend of Tôru's wife's family and a fortune-teller. Portentiously, Honda instructs Tôru: "The law presides over things of this world, finally. The world where shadow is shadow and light is light, yin is yin and yang is yang... But you don't belong to that world sonny. The world you belong to is above that or below that. It's not a question of better or worse [to be above or below this world]. The point is, not to resist the flow.... When there's no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up. If everything dries up, the world is darkness" (*The Wind-Up Bird* 1997, 51). Honda's riddle of action versus passivity, the metaphor of the well, and of relativity is not clear. In time, Tôru's position will come to represent how we are in relation to evil, initially relating to the conflict in China, then brought into oblique relation to media violence, the public's deliberate ignorance, and Japan's collective cultural identity personified in the Noboru narrative. The Sino-Japanese conflict is developed by the addition of Akasaka Nutmeg's story of her father's experience in a zoo, where he was witness to the senseless slaughter of animals, and by another character, Lt. Mamiya, in his accounts of Boris the Skinner, torture, death, and survival in Manchuria. At the mercy of the barbaric skin-peeler, he escaped death by hiding in a well-like hole, a place, we recall, of our lightweight protagonist. The reader comes to realize that it is not as important to isolate specific events and meaning than to see threads tied in the flow of events, particularly evil, between above and below, people and periods, between Manchuria and present-day Tokyo. Another accidental operative who intended to become a teacher rather than make a career out of war, Lt. Mamiya likens himself to Tôru in his ordinariness. He is a conduit for this experience, not a messiah. Significantly, Murakami's object is not only to highlight contemporary Japan's unwillingness to acknowledge their complicity in the Sino-Japanese holocaust by erasing the slaughter of Chinese during the imperialist aggression from public education textbooks. The author's project is also to complicate this history by presenting Chinese and other aggression against Japanese soldiers, the omnipresence of evil over time and space perpetuated by people's unwillingness to learn.

Mirroring the duplication/interpretation technique of "The Purloined Letter," the letter-text Lt.

Mamiya writes for Toru and the public about his experience in the war avenges itself of its own erasure, of other written histories, and brings forward this more complete, and complicated, history of Japanese identity forcing Tôru, as well as readers and individuals in contemporary Japanese society, to acknowledge his complicity in creating convenient historical elisions. The methodologies of detection, discovery, and sense-making reading strategies, engaged to no avail for the purposes of other narratives of the text, are left towering in these Manchurian chronicles, as with the redress that occurs in Corpi's feminist and activist hardboileds. If science fiction and fantasy have an ontological emphasis, while classical detection, concerned with questions of interpretation, is essentially epistemological, (as Brian McHale finds in *Postmodernist Fiction*), in Murakami's neo-modernist text we discover both relativity and a positional moral ground. Considering the deadly metaphysical questions Murakami raises in other narrative threads, then, we might be satisfied that Murakami's is a noteworthy social comment on justice, but this naïve faith also is dashed: Murakami appends a "Works Consulted" at the end of the book. This list of seven recognized histories and analyses of the Manchurian War, including one on the fabled barbarian, "Beria, Stalin's First Lieutenant," serves also to remind readers of historical fictional reconstruction. As mentioned earlier with the discussion of hailing, even the barbarian's name here has changed.

The ethical position and the narrative re-writing by Murakami here, perhaps even more so than Corpi, does not signal a closed re-writing of history, not least because we know that he knows from Poe that one letter is worthy of another. The ethical aspect of Murakami's revision lies in, however, a relatively sustained look at how the public develops identity. If the relatively un-self-reflexive members of contemporary Japanese society, gullible and culpable, still populate Murakami's narrative in the end, it is yet possible that this society, with this new knowledge, may indeed slowly shift. The monstrous Other, Murakami's text demonstrates without moralizing, is also the pervasive, unseen evil of ignorance and desire that may be made visible to contemporary Japan. The doubling narrative, between the misrepresentation in Japanese history books and lived experience, is wisely left open. By creating a generic palimpsest on the discourse of truth, recent hardboileds such as Murakami's combine postmodern fantastic structures of metaphysical detection and ontologies of unfamiliar universes which may yet "provoke profound moral and metaphysical questions" (Ewert 15).

Alongside the indeterminacy characteristic of many postmodern texts, then, Corpi's and Murakami's neo-modernist hardboiled fictions re-examine narrative, cultural history, and society. If "postmodernist literature (post-World War II) uses detective fiction as a recurrent narrative subtext in much the same way that modernism uses mythology" (Holquist 165), hardboiled fiction, as evident in the American and Japanese texts presented here, can be seen as a response to, or foresight of, recent global crises of post-capitalist societies and questions of race and cultural identity. Like Poe's story, which rings closed (with no closure) with Dupin's citation from Crébillon, "Un dessein si funeste, S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste," these texts play on deadly design, deceit, and worthiness. They proffer a (sinister) metatextual comment on detective/historical narrative, deploying the methodology of the master (in a left-handed way), re-using its elements, and subverting the narrative through its own method. In terms of systems upheld in the social order which traditional hardboiled strived to restore, these works undermine ordinary narrative and leave the text open for an ethics of change. The production, regulation, and circulation of history, in this postmodern and poststructuralist view, is a controvertible discourse, not a statement of fact. By challenging the assumption of priority or authority attributed to previous claims, procedures, and social actions, Corpi and Murakami interrogate not only "whodunnit," but also who and what were present or neglected in the overlapping relations of power, knowledge, and truth that produced the narrative, the crime, and the criminal. The forgotten crimes presented here thus show how historical narratives may be permeable to subsequent thefts, re-readings, and ethical interventions. The tension in the knowledge gap between the detection's over-arching story (*histoire*) and its telling or plot (*discours*) relates to our construction, interpretation, performance and re-telling of cultural narratives. This role, which in postmodern texts

can be parodied, undermined, or rendered simply ineffectual, nonetheless relies on the assumption that words can point to other, albeit deconstructed, meanings. This frail hermeneutic anchoring of diagnosis and decoding, then, has led to the genre's recent popularity, particularly resurgent in the last years of the twentieth century, as a response of alterity, of the Other, and of alternate histories to the structuring of crimes within given histories. Like Poe's hero Dupin, Corpi and Murakami have interpreted the facts both analytically and empathetically. Placing themselves self-consciously in text, however, these contemporary fictions open narrative and retrieve other bodies lost to certain legitimated, patriarchal, imperialist, cultural, or social histories. By using the elements of the hardboiled in part against itself like other recent neo-modernist authors of hardboiled fiction, Corpi and Murakami offer a metacritical commentary on detection in order to show how knowledge (crime) is produced. Finally, these authors insert their stories of crime within a wider social sphere of evil, social corruption, and institutionalized abuses as an ethical intervention against systems on behalf of forgotten voices. If seeing one's double is in fact seeing one's counterpart in death, in the present doubling readers are here witness to the murder of ordinary history. And we might hope, by the hand of these hardboiled narratives of robust good health, that it expires.

### Works Cited

- Black, Joel. "(De)feats of Detection: The Spurious Key Text from Poe to Eco." *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*. Ed. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999. 75-100.
- Corpi, Lucha. *Black Widow's Wardrobe*. Houston: Arte Publico P, 1999.
- Corpi, Lucha. *Cactus Blood*. Houston: Arte Publico P, 1995.
- Corpi, Lucha. *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*. Houston: Arte Publico P, 1992.
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Purveyor of Truth." Trans. W. Domingo. *Yale French Studies* 2 (1975): 31-113.
- Ewert, Jeanne C. "A Thousand Other Mysteries: Metaphysical Detection, Ontological Quests." *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*. Ed. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999. 179-98.
- Holquist, Michael. "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction." *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*. Ed. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe. New York: Harcourt, 1983. 149-74.
- Irwin, John. *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.
- Irwin, John. "Mysteries We Reread, Mysteries of Rereading: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story." *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*. Ed. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999. 27-54.
- Johnson, Barbara. "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida." *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. By Barbara Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980. 110-46.
- Lacan, Jacques. "Seminar on the Purloined Letter." Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. 1956. *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 38-72.
- McHale, Brian. *Constructing Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Merivale, Patricia, and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds. *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999.
- Murakami Haruki. *Hitsuji o meguru bôken*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982.
- Murakami Haruki. *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987.
- Murakami Haruki. *Nejimakidori kuronikuru*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1994-95. Vols. 1-3.
- Murakami Haruki. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Trans. Jay Rubin. New York: Knopf, 1997.
- Murakami Haruki. *Sekai no owari to hâdo-boirudo wandârando*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985.
- Murakami Haruki. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of the World*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1991.
- Natoli, Joseph. *Postmodern Journeys: Film and Culture, 1996-1998*. New York: State U of New York P, 2000.
- Paretsky, Sara. *Hard Time*. New York: Random House, 1999.
- Paretsky, Sara. *Total Recall*. New York: Random House, 2001.
- Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Purloined Letter." *The Collected Works of Edgar Allen Poe*. Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969-78. 972-76.

Author's profile: Cathy Steblyk teaches comparative and Japanese literature in the Department of Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. Steblyk's areas of scholarship include feminist and cultural studies, twentieth-century Japanese literature, autobiographical fiction, the East Asian post-war avant-garde, and film. Among her publications, Steblyk has co-edited, with Evelyn Ellerman, *Feminism and Postmodernism*, a thematic issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* (1994) and *Josei gaku bukku gaido II (A Women's Studies*

*Bibliography II*) (1997), and submitted for publication recently "Yoko Ono, Fluxus and Japan's Post-War Avant-Garde" to *Monumenta Nipponica*. Her book-length manuscript on Japanese I-fiction, entitled *Fantastic Subjects: The Personal Turn in Japan's Cultural Narratives*, is under review for publication. Steblyk is also at work on a new manuscript, *Asia's Post-War Avant-Garde*. E-mail: <[cps6@psu.edu](mailto:cps6@psu.edu)>.