**Chiaki Takagi, University of North Carolina at Greensboro**

“Such an Uncanny Place: Tokyo in Murakami Haruki’s Wind-Up Bird Chronicle”

**Abstract:** Japan’s modernization cannot be discussed without mentioning its dependency on the Western cultural identity. Since the Meiji period, Japan has embraced the West, and modern Japan has become a hybrid cultural space that is symbolized by Tokyo. Tokyo is the symbol of Japan’s postwar prosperity. However, this seemingly hybrid place is rife with Western cultural icons and English loan words (Katakana words), which are confused with cultural sophistication. Murakami Haruki sets most of his works in Tokyo and often depicts the city as a cultural and linguistic chaos that keeps people from realizing their lack of individuality. In Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, he persistently depicts Tokyo as a modern space with a hole inside through symbolic use of an alley, a well, and doughnuts. The hole represents the historical amnesia of the postwar Japanese, whose lives are filled with borrowed culture from the West. In the midst of postwar prosperity, the protagonist who realizes the “strangeness” of his life engages in a search for himself by going down to the bottom of the old well in the middle of Tokyo. Through this experience, he is connected to Japan’s modern history. Murakami attributes the disorientation of the postwar individuals to their historical amnesia and Western hegemony and attempts to connect them to their lost roots. This paper discusses Murakami’s representation of Tokyo as a place distorted by the modern, paying special attention to his use of Katakana words as well as the symbolism of an alley, a well, and doughnuts.

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**Noriko Chino, Independent Scholar**

“Miyabe Miyuki and Her Description of Shitamachi Tokyo”

**Abstract:** Among popular Japanese mystery writers, Miyabe Miyuki is perhaps the foremost in describing Tokyo and environs. In this paper, I will examine the following novels, Tokyo shitamachi satsujin boshoku (Why Murders were Committed in Shitamachi, 1990), Kasha (The Wheel of Fire, 1992), Hitotchi kanon (Captured, 1996), Riyū (Reasons, 1998), and R.P.G. (Role Playing Game, 2001). All five of these novels are embedded in the social, geographic, and physical realities of the city. As will be argued in this paper, not only does Miyabe Miyuki employ very detailed and precise descriptions of identifiable neighborhoods in Tokyo, she also describes the pressing contemporary social problems that threaten shitamachi life. The common denominator of the stories above is the detailed description of the Tokyo environs that draws the readers into the stories and the social conflicts that seem universal to contemporary modern societies. Her illustration of the corners of shitamachi makes the readers feel as if they are standing at the same corner with the protagonists. It is Miyabe’s commitment to portraying the milieu of neighborhood Tokyo, and that makes her work significant in modern Japanese mystery fiction.

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**Raechel Dumas, University of Colorado at Boulder**

“Playing House: Suburbia and Self in Miyabe Miyuki’s R.P.G.”

**Abstract:** The suburban topography of Miyabe Miyuki’s 2001 police procedural R.P.G. represents an increasingly common image among works of contemporary Japanese crime fiction. Although in Japan and elsewhere crime narratives conventionally unfold against the backdrop of the gloomy urban metropolis whose seedy peripheries harbor the socially aberrant and morally misguided, a number of contemporary Japanese crime writers have embraced the once-innocuous suburb as the setting for their murderous plots. The suburbanization of the genre not only reflects a collective disappointment regarding the extent to which the landscapes of formerly idyllic neighborhoods have been transformed by recent economic trends, but also signifies a meaningful shift in the subject of the Japanese crime novel, the perpetrator having been transplanted from the dark recesses of the city to the inside of the home. Nevertheless, as R.P.G.—whose narrative plays out in both the domestic sphere and the virtual one—demonstrates, suburban crime shares with its urban counterpart a number of attributes, including a fundamental concern with the frequently vexed relationship between identity and place. This paper examines the manner in which this relationship is constructed in R.P.G., arguing that Miyabe’s interpolation of the conventional crime narrative conflict between space and self into her exploration of contemporary domestic life seeks to underscore some of the ways in which modern cultural anxieties that have conventionally been projected onto the urban landscape are firmly embedded within the ostensibly “private” sphere.