DISCUSSION GUIDE

A Wild Sheep Chase by Haruki Murakami

1. Which characters in the book have names, and which do not? What role do nicknames play? What nickname might Murakami choose for you?

2. In a bookstore, where would you shelve this book—in mystery, mythology, or some other category? Why?

3. To what end does Murakami employ the novel’s various structural devices (letters, fables, history, transcripts, illustrations)? Do you find these devices effective? Why or why not?

4. Which scenes from the book can you imagine Magritte painting?

5. What do you think of the book’s only illustration on page 296? Why do you think Murakami chose to include it?

6. Images and their reproductions are a prominent theme of A Wild Sheep Chase. Why is the central image so durable? Do you think all images are like that? If not, what makes this image different?

7. This book was translated into English from Japanese. Does that fact affect your interpretation of the story’s symbols?

8. Buddhist ideas of non-attachment and nihilism are found throughout the book. Do you see similar themes in Magritte’s work? What is the relationship between those themes and Surrealism?

9. Does this novel dovetail with your notions about Japanese culture?

10. On page 143, Murakami writes: “I am sure you think that all I am saying is a load of nonsense. And perhaps it is. It might well turn out to be total nonsense.” Do you find meaning in this book, or do you find it to be “total nonsense”? Must works of art and literature contain meaning?

11. Did you find the book’s ending predictable? Why or why not?

12. A Wild Sheep Chase is the second novel in a series known as the Trilogy of the Rat. Are you interested in reading the other books in the trilogy? Why or why not?

13. What did you find most surreal about this novel?

Suggested additional reading and viewing:
- Blow-Up (1966 film)
- Species of Spaces and Other Pieces by Georges Perec
- Pinball, 1973 by Haruki Murakami (prequel to A Wild Sheep Chase)
- Dance, Dance, Dance by Haruki Murakami (sequel to A Wild Sheep Chase)

To complement your reading, visit:
Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926–1938
June 24, 2014—October 13, 2014