

The Labyrinth and the Non-Solution: Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* and the Metaphysical Detective

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Abstract

Many of Murakami's novels demonstrate his appropriation of the terminology, imagery and metaphor that are found in hardboiled detective fiction. The question of Haruki Murakami's use of the tropes from hardboiled detective stories has been discussed by scholars such as Hantke (2007), Stretcher (2002) and Suter (2008), who argue that the writer uses these features as a way to organize his narratives and to pay homage to one of his literary heroes, Raymond Chandler. However, these arguments have not adequately addressed the fact that many of Murakami's novels fit into the definition of the metaphysical detective story, which is "a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions" (Merivale & Sweeney 1999:2). Using this definition as a guiding principle, this paper addresses the issue of the metaphysical detective features apparent in Murakami's third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, and, more specifically, looks at his use of the non-solution and labyrinth as narrative devices. The main argument, then, is that Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* fits in with the metaphysical detective novel and uses the familiar tropes of the labyrinth and the non-solution to highlight our impossible search for meaning.

Keywords

metaphysical detective – the labyrinth – the non-solution – Postmodernism – Murakami

บทคัดย่อ

ความสลับซับซ้อนและการไร้ทางออก: นิยายเรื่อง A Wild Sheep Chase ของมูราคามิกับความเป็นนิยายสืบสวนแนวอภิปรัชญา

นิยายของมูราคามิจำนวนมากได้แสดงให้เห็นถึงการปรับใช้คำศัพท์เฉพาะทาง การเปรียบเทียบให้เห็นภาพ และอุปสรรค ซึ่งพบในนิยายสืบสวนแนวสมจริงที่ ตัวเอกเป็นคนด้านขวาไร้หัวใจ ประเด็นเรื่องการใช้ลักษณะที่มาจากนิยายประเภทดังกล่าวเหล่านี้ของ ฮารุกิ มูราคามิ ได้รับการอภิปรายโดยนักวิชาการหลายคน เช่น ฮันท์ เก (2007) สเตรทเซอร์ (2002) และสตูเตอร์ (2008) นักวิชาการเหล่านี้กล่าวว่า มูราคามิใช้ลักษณะเหล่านี้เป็นวิธีการหนึ่งในการจัดระเบียบเรื่องเล่าของเขา และเพื่อแสดงความเคารพต่อบุคคลผู้เป็นหนึ่งในวีรบุรุษด้านวรรณกรรมของเขา นั่นคือเรย์มอนด์ แชนด์เลอร์ อย่างไรก็ตาม คำอภิปรายเหล่านี้ยังไม่ได้กล่าวถึงข้อเท็จจริงที่ว่านิยายของมูราคามิจำนวนมากมีลักษณะตรงตามคำนิยามของนิยายสืบสวนแนวอภิปรัชญา ซึ่งหมายถึง “ตัวบทที่ล้อเลียนหรือลบล้างขนบของนิยายสืบสวนดั้งเดิม” (Merivale & Sweeney 1999:2) บทความนี้ใช้คำนิยามดังกล่าวเป็นแนวทางในการกล่าวถึงประเด็นเรื่องลักษณะของนิยายสืบสวนแนวอภิปรัชญาที่เห็นได้ชัดเจนในนิยายลำดับที่สามของมูราคามิเรื่อง A Wild Sheep Chase และกล่าวโดยเฉพาะเจาะจงกว่านั้น บทความนี้ศึกษาการใช้การไร้ทางออกและความสลับซับซ้อนเป็นเครื่องมือในการเล่าเรื่อง ดังนั้น ประเด็นหลักของบทความนี้ คือนิยายเรื่อง A Wild Sheep Chase ของ มูราคามิสามารถจัดเข้าเป็นนิยายสืบสวนแนวอภิปรัชญาได้ และใช้ลักษณะที่พบเห็นได้ทั่วไปอย่างความสลับซับซ้อนและการไร้ทางออกเพื่อเน้นการค้นหาคำหมายที่เป็นไปไม่ได้

The detective story has always been a game played between the author and the reader. It creates a world where logic, reason and process lead inevitably to motives, solutions, and the perpetrator. In a world that has become more and more complex, the traditional detective story reassures readers with logical plots that have the ability to “deliver us from evil and lead us toward the broad daylight of understanding [and] towards a restoration of the social order that the crime had so violently disturbed” (Bertens 1997:196). The genre is also attractive to the writer as it provides a pattern to follow, a well-worn template that offers identifiable tropes as well as scope for invention and creative interpretation. For Murakami, it is a window into another culture, another way of life. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, the Japanese novelist describes his novels as a marriage of Chandler and Dostoyevsky and says that by writing in this way, he alters the rules of the game by using the structure and tropes of the hardboiled detective story to examine aspects of existence rather than re-telling a crime story from a Japanese perspective (Wry 2004). As a consequence, the global, cosmopolitan reader of metaphysical detective fiction (and the writer) will have to learn to play new games and abandon the

certainty of the traditional detective narrative. According to Owen (Rzepka, & Horsley 2010), “Innovations in detective fiction rely upon the standard rules of the ‘game’ for their effectiveness. The postmodern (metaphysical) detective novel goes beyond subverting the traditions of detective fiction, since these formulas are not enough to determine ontological answers (or, simply put, ‘reality’) in a more complex age”. Murakami’s novel under discussion, *A Wild Sheep Chase*,¹ is clearly an example of the metaphysical detective story. The novel’s plot, as the title suggests, is the tale of a reluctant detective who is forced to search for a mysterious sheep in a Deleuzian labyrinth with rhizomatic potential.

In this essay I argue that the metaphysical or postmodern detective story that Haruki Murakami employs is not simply an homage or playful exploitation of the genre. The deconstruction of the genre and the blurring of genre lines lead the reader not only to question the nature of the genre itself, but force the reader to question the very notion of reality. And, while Murakami uses and subverts a variety of common tropes found in detective fiction, this essay will explore the labyrinth and the non-solution as a way of highlighting the impossible search for meaning that is presented in the author’s third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*.

1 Murakami and the Hardboiled Genre

Murakami’s search for a voice and method by which to communicate his ideas was guided by his love of hardboiled fiction and, more importantly, the novels of Raymond Chandler. As a translator of American fiction before he became a novelist, Murakami was heavily influenced by the books he translated into Japanese. His first two novels, described as “immature works” (Wry 2004) by the author himself, did not employ the tropes of hardboiled fiction as they were short experiments with language and did not rely on structure. His third novel *A Wild Sheep Chase*, however, uses a wide array of narrative devices that can be found in the hardboiled novels of Chandler. Murakami himself acknowledges his third novel (the first he allowed to be translated) to be “the true beginning of my style” (Wry 2004). As Hantke quite rightly points out, the hardboiled detective tradition has provided Murakami with “a blueprint for protagonist and plot”. The author went on after the success of *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982) to use the same ‘blueprint’ in the subsequent novels *Hardboiled Wonderland and*

1 ความสับสนซับซ้อนและการไร้ทางออก: นิยายเรื่อง A WILD SHEEP CHASE ของมูราคามิกับความ เป็นนิยายสืบสวนแนวอภิปรัชญา.

the End of the World (1985), *Dance, Dance, Dance* (1988) and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1995).

Subverting the tropes of detective fiction is hardly a new strategy and has been used extensively to parody the traditional detective story. Early versions of this type of story can be found in Borges and Nabokov and then in the *nouveau roman* of French writers such as Robbe-Grillet. Another early version can be found in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). These stories, however, all mimic Poe's Dupin or Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Murakami, on the other hand, prefers to subvert the tropes of the hardboiled detective novel, "parody[ing] the human and fallible detective of the hard-boiled school" (Suter 2008:93). Murakami is drawn to the fact that the hardboiled detective is personally affected by the journey he takes. The author believes that the hard-boiled detective genre provides him with the perfect vehicle to examine the themes that he is interested in exploring:

"as far as my thinking about the hard-boiled style" is concerned, Murakami explains, "I'm interested in the fact that [hard-boiled detectives] are very individualist in orientation. The figure of the loner. I'm interested in that because it isn't easy to live in Japan as an individualist or a loner. I'm always thinking about this. I'm a novelist and I'm a loner, an individualist".

RUBIN 2002: 6–7

By adopting the central character, the structure, and the tone of the hard-boiled detective novel, Murakami finds an instrument that infuses his story with familiarity, which provides the reader with a way into the text. The tropes that one is faced with when reading the opening chapters of *A Wild Sheep Chase* are familiar in the same way a hardboiled novel's plot is to a devotee.

A deeper reading of Murakami's central character, however, suggests that hardboiled weariness functions as a defense mechanism against the trauma of modernity; rhizomatic connections open up and make it difficult to get a firm grasp on reality, which becomes open to endless interpretation. As a result, Murakami's protagonists "embody the intuition, ubiquitous in late modernity, that the inexplicable has become commonplace: it is normal that abnormal things occur" (Merivale & Sweeney 1999:7). *A Wild Sheep Chase* employs "a mystery type quest and an impossible search for meaning" (Suter 2008: 93). To create this 'impossible search for meaning' Murakami employs two of the most compelling and common features of the metaphysical detective story; namely, the labyrinth and the non-solution, which highlight the rhizomatic nature of creating meaning and interpretation.

2 The Metaphysical/Postmodern Detective Story

Writers who have employed the elements of the metaphysical detective story use the genre “to address unfathomable epistemological and ontological questions: What, if anything, can we know? What, if anything, is real? How, if at all, can we rely on anything besides our own constructions of reality? In this sense, metaphysical detective stories are indeed concerned with metaphysics” (Merivale & Sweeney 1999: 4). The term was originally coined by Haycraft and later adopted by critics such as Holquist and Merivale. According to Holquist, the metaphysical detective story adopts the “method” of the detective novel but not its “telos.” He contends that “postmodernists use as a foil the assumption of detective fiction that the mind can solve all: by

twisting the details, just the opposite becomes the case” (Holquist 1971:173). Merivale defines this postmodern variant as “a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective story conventions – such as narrative closure and the detective’s role as a surrogate reader – with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot” (1999:2). The metaphysical detective story, in short, simultaneously constructs and deconstructs the genre, using its conventions and formal properties to subvert its underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions.

SHILOH 2011: 4

For Murakami “the question that most often concerns him is one of identity – how it is formed, how it may be maintained, how it can be lost due to traumatic circumstances, and what its loss might mean to the contemporary society” (Stretcher 2002:213). The author employs the tropes of the hardboiled detective novel in an effort to expose the mysteries that surround the character on the journey rather than the perpetrator or the victim. The protagonist, through his investigation, faces more personal concerns and crises and, as a result, the crime and investigation shrink into the distance. As Michael Holquist (1971) points out “If in the detective story, death must be solved, in the new metaphysical detective story, it is life that must be solved.”

3 Murakami and the Labyrinth

...the maze is an embodiment of contraries – art and chaos, comprehensible artifact and inexplicable experience, pleasure and terror.

DOOB 1990

It could be argued that all detective stories are labyrinths; carefully constructed puzzles that are designed to lead the reader into a maze only to later release them by providing access to Ariadne's thread through a neat and logical denouement. According to Umberto Eco, there are three types of labyrinth. The first, the Greek Labyrinth, "...does not allow anyone to get lost: you go in, arrive at the centre, and then from the centre you reach the exit. This is the labyrinth of Daedalus that Theseus enters to slay the Minotaur and the labyrinth wherein Theseus is guided out by Ariadne's thread." (Eco 1984:57). The second labyrinth, The Mannerist, "if you unravel it, you find in your hands a kind of tree, a structure with roots, with many blind alleys. There is only one exit, but you can get it wrong. You need an Ariadne's thread to keep from getting lost. This labyrinth is the model of the trial and error process" (Eco 1984: 57). The traditional detective story falls into Eco's definition of the Mannerist maze: there are dead-ends, red herrings, confusion and frustration; however, the solution (or Minotaur) is always eventually discovered, revealed and defeated. The third labyrinth and the one that is an apt symbol for the metaphysical detective story is the rhizomatic labyrinth as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari: "so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no centre, no periphery, no exit because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture is a rhizome space" (Eco 1984:57).

Murakami's novel employs the rhizomatic structure rather than the Greek or Mannerist varieties. Though the novel contains rhizomatic potential rather than a rhizomatic structure, the text does not allow for multiple points of entry and exit. In the metaphysical labyrinth the story does not end in the sense that a traditional detective story ends. This labyrinth, however, does not necessarily need to be only a symbol of confusion, of imprisonment, of distress. By its very nature, it offers the writer (and by extension the reader) the opportunity to play with language, culture and literary genres. As Edwards (1998:227–228) states, "Like Borges's labyrinth and Barth's funhouse, [...] it is a scene for distraction, a place of play but one in which there are opportunities for instruction as well as amusement and entertainment". Hahn (2013:4) identifies this idea of a labyrinth without an exit and a puzzle without a solution, but also echoes Edwards's idea that it is not necessarily a negative manifestation:

"What one learns in the journey, however, does not lead to success in reaching the center or escaping the labyrinth. What the labyrinth-maze discloses, instead of the 'answer', is its remarkable resemblance to the world: making one's own judgment at every turn despite never 'understanding', so to speak, the big picture. Experience in the labyrinth parallels life itself: one constantly learns about the external world as

well as the self. Yet nothing is ever sure while living inside the labyrinth". Thus, one does not encounter meaning, but the possibility or potential of meaning.

This is also the sense in which Murakami uses the hardboiled detective structure. His nameless protagonist comes to the conclusion after facing a proliferation of clues that: "There're many things we don't really know. It's an illusion that we know anything at all." This echoes the protagonist William (Eco 1983:599) in *The Name of the Rose*, who, when he realises that he is adrift in a rhizomatic labyrinth, exclaims: "I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe". To be lost becomes significant in itself; the quest becomes the goal.

Murakami also refers to the labyrinthine nature of the quest, noting that traditional sources of direction like a compass or a map are unable to assist the budding detective make his way through the city of Tokyo:

Gradually, I was getting worn down. My sense of direction had evaporated by our fourth day. When south became the opposite of east, I bought a compass, but going around with a compass only made the city seem less and less real. The buildings began to look like backdrops in a photography studio, the people walking in the streets like cardboard cutouts.

MURAKAMI 1990: 203

Another labyrinth that is apparent in Murakami's novel is the many and varied examples of intertextuality that in themselves lead to even wider possible interpretations. According to Harold Bloom (2009:17), "All literary influence is labyrinthine", which is evident in Murakami's text. *A Wild Sheep Chase* offers a proliferation of literary allusions. Further, as a reader we find various other allusions in Murakami's novel from both high and popular culture. His novel includes references to the works of Mickey Spillane, Kenzaburo Oe, Allen Ginsberg, Yukio Mishima, Ellery Queen, Proust, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, H.G. Wells, Karl Marx, Chiang Kai-shek, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov, and *Theologia Germanica*. Some examples from music are the Doors, the Rolling Stones, the Byrds, Deep Purple, the Moody Blues, Mozart, Bach, the Beach Boys, the Beatles, Boz Scaggs, Chopin, the Brothers Johnson, Bill Withers, and Maynard Ferguson, which may or may not be significant in terms of understanding the text, but they certainly add to the labyrinthine nature of the quest and the infinite rhizomatic trajectories the reader could pursue if he or she were to attempt to interpret every clue contained in the text.

The labyrinth in many ways suits the impossible search for meaning that is a common preoccupation of postmodern literature. As Doob (1990) points out, the labyrinth offers the writer and reader “ambiguity and convertibility”; an opportunity to invite interpretation and change. The multicursal labyrinth is characterized by this changeability; it proffers many pathways that lead to an ever expanding subjectivity not only within the text but for the reader. As readers we experience the interlocutor’s world as he traverses the ever-changing alleys and tries to navigate the infinite plateaus as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). For Murakami the labyrinth is more than a metaphor; it offers instead a poetics, a way to discover, explore, and challenge labyrinths constructed of the experiences of everyday life – the city, the home, the library, culture, identity, even the book itself. The labyrinth, then, functions as an extended allegory for textual interpretation – for the *aporia* implicit in the acts of reading and writing. The reader, like Theseus, must navigate the infinite choices available when he enters the labyrinth and move towards a productive interpretation of an indeterminate space that is filled with dead ends and is teeming with repetition. Thus, the labyrinth in the text is a metaphor for the circuitous, often tortuous quest for self-knowledge and understanding; a quest that inevitably leads to no tangible understanding. “There’re many things we don’t really know. It’s an illusion that we know anything at all” (Murakami 1990:202). The labyrinth underlies the structure as well as the content, indeed it provides narrative shape. The novel is, in effect, a labyrinth in and of itself, and it becomes the task of the reader to navigate the pathways of its pages.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Murakami employs various non-linear narrative techniques that highlight the labyrinth. The first of these is the novel’s start *in medias res*. By starting his novel ‘into the middle of things’ we are immediately disorientated and read on in an effort to find what came before and the significance of the starting point. However, we discover that there are no real beginnings or endings in these novels and the whole story is an example of *in medias res*. The novel begins with the protagonist coming across a news story of an ex-girlfriend who has died in a car accident. The protagonist starts an investigation and we believe that the journey has begun. However, by the second page this investigation is solved and we realise that this initial story may have no significance in relation to the rest of the novel. And in fact, it does not. Another non-linear narrative device that is employed by Murakami is his inclusion of dreams and the supernatural as ways of understanding and interpreting his quest. “There are symbolic dreams – dreams that symbolize some reality. Then there are symbolic realities – realities that symbolise a dream” (Murakami

1990:79). After the protagonist has a dream about a cow giving him a pair of pliers, he muses: "This plunges me into a whole universe of alternative considerations. And in this universe of alternative considerations, the major problem is that everything becomes protracted and complex... The thing is never resolved... The only way to get out of the worm universe is to dream another symbolic dream" (Murakami 1990:79–80). The protagonist's girlfriend with the 'magic ears' sheds more light on the mystery than any sleuth work undertaken by the reluctant detective. The Rat, a close friend of the protagonist who has disappeared, returns after he has committed suicide to try to explain the quest, but he is unable to do this satisfactorily. We realise that even after death there is no revealing of meaning. The labyrinth continues. Yet another example of non-linear narrative found in the novel is the resistance of cause and effect relationships. In the traditional detective story clues build on each other and lead the reader and the detective/protagonist to the solution, to the perpetrator, to the exit. In the metaphysical detective story, on the other hand, each clue leads to more confusion, more labyrinthine paths and no foreseeable exit. The protagonist's misreading of the narratives that surround him exposes the reader's similarly obstructed interpretation. "...we can in the same breath deny that there is any such thing as coincidence. What's done is done, what's yet to be is clearly yet to be. In other words, sandwiched as we are between the "everything" that is behind us and the 'zero' beyond us, ours is an ephemeral existence in which there is neither coincidence nor possibility" (Murakami 1990:96). Thus, it becomes clear that non-sequential narrative devices make participatory demands on the reader which mirror the experiences of wandering the labyrinth.

The message, then, that we glean from reading metaphysical detective stories is this: "learn to read without relying on the detective's interpretations; [...] learn to read in a world that offers conjectures and structuring systems, but no single overriding structure [...] recognise that the labyrinth represents a radically different universe than the one [...] expected" (Merivale and Sweeney 1999:188). Thus, the text frustrates the reader's quest for meaning, which is highlighted by the labyrinthine nature of the quest, the endless intertextuality and sense of play that is the defining feature of the postmodern/metaphysical detective story.

4 Murakami and the Non-Solution

Murakami's reluctance to offer clear-cut solutions has a tremendous effect on the reader. His technique shows traces of Stefano Tani's Deconstructive

Anti-Detective novel, which “emphasizes the non-solution...”: “the deconstructive category emphasises the non-solution, the ambiguous perception of reality from the point of view of the detective” (Tani 1984:113). Of those analysed in Tani’s study, the most comparable novel to *A Wild Sheep Chase* in terms of its relationship to the deconstructive anti-detective novel is *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon (1966) (a novelist who is frequently compared to Murakami as both of the authors employ conspiracy theories, pastiche and the tropes from detective fiction).

In these novels the solution is withheld and this non-solution has a tremendous effect on readers, forcing them back into the text to find their own meaning or potential for meaning. Murakami’s aim is to introduce apparent contradictions and by presenting an unfeasibly large collection of possible clues, force us, the reader, to find some kind of personal or individual meaning in the text.

The non-solution also highlights the paranoid reading of text that is so common in postmodernist fiction. Which clue has significance? What is the relevance of this particular episode? Why did the writer include this particular information? We cannot read the novel like a traditional detective story, gathering clues and trusting the information presented by the narrator. The metaphysical detective story betrays our trust and one of the ways it does this is to refuse to offer any kind of plausible solution to the mystery.

Anti-detective fiction denies what the reader is accustomed to expect, justice and a happy denouement; it tantalises and confuses him by proliferating clues and by non-solution; or even plays prestidigitation games with him as it denies him heartfelt involvement, reassurance, and escape from reality by reminding him continuously that fiction is only fiction.

TANI 1984: 148

While this may frustrate the reader’s expectations, the non-solution is an essential aspect as it highlights the impossible search for meaning that we often find in postmodern novels. The non-solution is an essential aspect of the postmodern imagination; moreover, as a device in the metaphysical detective story, it means that the text remains incomplete and thus frustrates and undermines the expectations of the reader who, when reading a traditional detective story, expects to find a solution at the end of the book. In the metaphysical detective story, the reader does not find a solution, resolution or exit; the reader, if he wants to find anything, must go back into the text.

The lack of solution also offers a moment of release as the author has freed us from the false security of teleology. We are forced to read deeper, to

imagine ways into the text, to assign our own meaning and interpretation. As Tani (1984:40) states in his analysis of the anti-detective in postmodern American and Italian fiction: “[the metaphysical] detective novel’s open-ended non-solution, if well-worked out, leaves the reader with a proliferation of clues, allowing him to fabricate one or more possible denouements”. The reader, then, is a far more active participant in the creation of the story. Tani continues his analysis of the significance of the non-solution, when he states that “This is a way to leave the novel ‘alive’ (non-consumed), an object of curiosity even after the end, since a plausible solution imposed by the reader implies a rereading or rethinking, in which the artistic qualities of the novel finally stand out” (Tani 1984:85). It becomes clear that the open-ended nature of the text helps to cement the metaphysical detective story’s message more convincingly in the thoughts of the reader than a traditional detective story would.

Murakami addresses the idea that a story with a traditional solution would not suit the type of message he is trying to convey. The novel seems to support Nietzsche’s maxim that “Convictions are prisons” and that even though a story may end, there is still an infinity of interpretations awaiting the willing reader. This idea of the non-solution is evident in the author’s approach to the detective story; however, the novel also explicitly mentions this multiplicity when the protagonist says “The song is over. But the melody lingers on” (Murakami 1990:39) and “We habitually cut out pieces of time to fit us, so we tend to fool ourselves into thinking that time is our size, but it really goes on and on” (Murakami 1990:94). This is further highlighted in the text by the writer’s many allusions to jazz musicians such as Maynard Ferguson, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis. Murakami’s frequent references to jazz highlight the open-ended narrative of *A Wild Sheep Chase*. The story like the music involves free improvisation and a resistance to closure. As with jazz consumer culture and ideology, the narrative offers a complex composition that is labyrinthine in nature and potentially infinite. Thus, the text is aware of its rhizomatic implications and the fact that narrative, culture, ideology, meaning and time do not adhere to teleology.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase* “there is a proliferation of clues that also may be used to prove different solutions (or to confuse the reader totally)” (Tani 1984:86). Again, as Tani has pointed out, this non-solution helps the work remain ‘unconsumed’ and forces the reader to go back into the text in an effort to find some kind of meaning. By breaking the rules of genre distinction, the writer is challenging the global, cosmopolitan reader to become a better reader and by extension to find personal meaning.

One of the themes in *A Wild Sheep Chase* is the idea that real justice is illusory and unattainable. The traditional detective story’s motivations are

undermined and the journey becomes a far more personal experience for the reader. "...while in the conventional detective story 'justice' was implied in the solution and never stood out in the fiction, here the suspension of the solution leaves the lack of justice and the related mechanisms of power and corruption standing bare and unpunished in a 'decapitated structure', so that they become the real theme and purpose of the fiction" (Tani 1984:91). The quest that Murakami's protagonist finds himself going on is on behalf of a secret group that controls all aspects of Japanese society. The corruption that is at the heart of the story, however, is not part of the journey of the story. It is simply a fact that the author puts forward. The world we live in is manipulated by so many unseen forces that we have no hope of ever truly understanding how or by whom we are influenced.

A Wild Sheep Chase ends with a non-solution. And, although our protagonist is provided with some insights into his quest by the ghost of his friend the Rat, essentially he is no closer to finding meaning than when he reluctantly began his journey. The novel ends with the protagonist alone on a beach listening to the waves. His quest, in fact, has spawned more mysteries than it has solved. His girlfriend has disappeared, his friend has committed suicide, he has had an esoteric conversation with the sheepman and the 'real' reason for the quest is never clearly explained. By the end of the novel we are faced with a similar decision, to leave the quest and accept that meaning is unobtainable or return to the labyrinth and try again to find significance among the proliferation of clues that constitute the text. Thus, the non-solution forces the reader to see the rhizomatic potential of the text and its many entry and exit points.

Once trapped in the labyrinth or ensnared by the rhizomatic net, the detective cannot hope to find any kind of solution, though he is faced with a multitude of interpretations. The infinite number of possibilities starts to weigh heavily on his quest and, as each path leads to another and another *ad infinitum*, he starts to realise that a solution cannot be deduced from the multitude of clues that have become apparent. Herein lies the relationship between the labyrinth and the non-solution.

5 Conclusion

To reiterate, the reading of Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* is labyrinthine, which means that it is participatory and open-ended. By following up on the clues of the narrative – allusions to literature, history, pop culture, classical music; dreams; clairvoyance; and genre manipulation – we, as readers, discover only possibilities. Our confusion leads us into a myriad of images, of

unstable knowledge, of an endlessly forking path so that our final evaluation of Murakami's text must be that there is no exit. Murakami employs the meta-physical tropes of the labyrinth and the non-solution to highlight and play with the notion that our search for meaning in the world is impossible and destined to fail. He does not, however, advocate giving up. His advice is to go on these wild sheep chases and in doing so try to find out something essential about ourselves. Finally, the rhizomatic thinking that is encouraged by reading novels such as *A Wild Sheep Chase* exists so as to expand our minds and to help us to seek new possibilities.

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