

POSTSCRIPT

“Most of what I know about writing I’ve learned through running every day.”

– Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk about
When I Talk About Running*

Haruki Murakami’s memoir on writing and running is written with enigmatic, sometimes off-putting matter-of-factness. For instance, he states, “Emotional hurt is the price a person has to pay in order to be independent” (19). And again, “I don’t think most people would like my personality. There might be a few—*very* few, I would imagine—who are impressed by it, but only rarely would anyone like it” (20-21). He closes the book with a proposal for his gravestone:

Haruki Murakami
1949-20**
Writer (and Runner)
At Least He Never Walked (174)

Aside from revealing the author’s slightly awkward yet charming character, the book explores the central role of running to Murakami’s writing process. Running clears mental space, creating a “void” during which he doesn’t think “much of anything worth mentioning” (17). And running provides a means for relieving dissatisfaction and bad feelings, which simultaneously makes him “realize again how weak I am, how limited my abilities are. I become aware, physically, of these low points” (20). He runs “in order to acquire a void,” not to work out ideas for his novels, as convention might dictate. Only occasionally, he confides, does he “get an idea to use in a novel” while running (17). And yet, creating the void is preparation for writing, as it quiets his mind and generates calm and receptivity to language, story, and the immediate environment. Emptying his mind (as much as possible), not filling it up, is for Murakami a desirable precondition for writing. Putting it another way in an interview with *The Paris Review*, Murakami describes the repetition of his writing rituals as a “form of mesmerism” aimed at reaching a “deeper state of mind,” reminding me of Perl’s felt sense.

Murakami’s comments suggest that elements outside the writer and outside writing-proper are not only important to the production of writing but also constitute writing activity itself. Writing scholar Barbara Tomlinson articulates a similar point when she says that writing “is not a discrete event, but a pattern, a

background of repetitive moves, ways of thinking, ways of living” (35). Written acknowledgments in academic texts often confirm this point, though, as we saw in chapter one, they are typically interpreted, on the one hand, as evidence of the social scene of writing, and, on the other, as trite performatives, ripe for parody and dismissal. In contrast, for me, what writers see fit to thank reveals writing worlds that provide compelling, under-represented accounts of writing practices.

Acknowledgments invoke relationships and, in some cases, power relations. We can see this, for example, in the “Best Acknowledgments” competition, created by Margaret Heilbrun in 2011 and sponsored by *Library Journal*, which highlights, among other things, the labor of knowledge production. She reviews current books by historians and biographers, books that she finds most often entail library research, for acknowledgment of individual librarian contributions to research projects. Authors who thank librarians by name in their acknowledgments are most highly ranked, while the lower ranks include those who thank unnamed librarians at a particular library, interlibrary loan services generally, or, interestingly given my focus in this book, the architecture of a reading room or some other atmospheric. “Librarians, like all mortals,” writes Heilbrun, “love to be on the receiving end of gratitude.” The 2011 winner, Amanda Foreman, actually became the namesake for a category of acknowledgment in the 2012 competition; the most recent winner follows the Foreman “format” of naming every library accessed and every staff person consulted. The other category of acknowledgments included in the competition is Acknowledgments as Memoir, a personal narrative that includes “the names of all the kind souls in libraries. . . who helped.” The award is half tongue-in-cheek, half righteous comeuppance for all the overlooked librarians out there who have contributed in small and large ways to research projects.

The competition for appropriate forms of gratitude makes explicit the value of what acknowledgments often do very well: make elements of composing visible, offering antidotes to abstract conceptions that, wittingly or not, treat writing as interiority externalized. In an early essay about her own writing process, Susan Miller describes the value of composing studies as such: “I think it is very important for those of us who teach to understand what is at stake in our views of composing. [Composing] can itself be elevated and mystified to innocently recreate ideologies we would rather avoid” (“Rebelling” 174-75). The stakes for understanding composing as a complex act that is not merely skill-based are very high, as standardized testing continues to flourish in elementary and secondary education, and as postsecondary writing requirements are increasingly being eroded by dual-enrollment and other credit-granting programs that waive students from taking first-year writing (see Hansen and Farris). While my project

is not a direct intervention into state-sanctioned assessment of college student writing, I believe studies of composing that expose its complexity can counter misperceptions that writing is only as complex as a paragraph response to a test question. Against such simplifications, this book argues through a study of acknowledgments that writing is habituated attention to language made possible by the conditions and others that surround it.

I began this project by stating that I do not worry over distinctions between truth and fiction in acknowledgments, as both are rhetorical acts of choice-making that reveal worlds of writing. In homage to that commitment, I end with an exquisite corpse of acknowledgments excerpts, authored by the many partners I encountered during the drafting of this book and strung together to create a Frankensteinian performance of the genre. Because acknowledgments express a great deal of vitality around writing, much of which exceeds the constraints of the preceding chapters, I put that virtue into play, dramatizing the idea that writing is a populated act that has compelling lifecycles. In addition, I felt that ending with others' words, memories, and experiences was the appropriate choice for a book devoted to partners.

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“And, as a good deal of this book was conceived and written on board a number of fishing and dive boats, we wish to thank all of those boat captains who told us to quit talking about discourse and either get in the water or reel in a fish.”¹

“This book has been a good friend to me in various hospital and hospice rooms, through some very long nights and gloomy sunrises. I say this not to court any forgiveness or lowered expectations, but simply as a way of acknowledging that my father's elegant courage and pervasive desire to be useful inspired me to press on.”²

“I must also thank my yoga teachers who provided spirit, fortitude (without struggle), and, of course, the breath one cannot do without.”³

“The beginning of my journey on this book can be traced back to a hike in the Alaskan wilderness outside of Juneau, where friends and I were on our way to a remote cabin.”⁴

“Although the result [of my messy writing process] is a decorator's disaster, I know exactly where everything is—all around me like an embrace, exactly where I need it. If the authors of these works were here in person the room would look like a CCCC convention, enlivened by a swirl of teachers and writers great and good, philosophers, psychologists, rhetoricians, travelers, social commentators, anthropologists, and more, and student writers, generations past and present. I would greet them with the hugs of welcome, and of thanks, that I extend figu-

ratively not only from this page, but on every page of *Composition Studies as a Creative Art*.”⁵

“I wrote much of this book during my wife’s terminal illness.”⁶

“Finally and with love, I offer special thanks to Isaac Kramnick, who read this manuscript in its entirety on the beaches of Croix-Val-Mer and then again alongside Kelm Lake, acts of sublime virtue beyond the imaginings of any rhetorician.”⁷

“To Robb Jackson who kept telling me to just poop it on out. . . .To my daughter Christine and her classmates for teaching me about the disruptive discourse of farting in a sixth-grade classroom.”⁸

“Janette Miller, although deceased, somehow still helped me get home—a place I wouldn’t know I needed to be otherwise, which I’m grateful for every day.”⁹

This book took form through conversations during “conference hotel breakfasts or stolen in those rare moments when our (combined) four children were somehow not needing attention.”¹⁰

“I have depended on a network of scholars, texts, computer hardware and software, friends and family. The entire process has been distributed among countless interactions with people and resources in the environment; it is embodied in this text and in physical interactions with it; it has emerged over time from a few key concepts into a theoretical framework and finally into this extended study; and it has been enacted in a set of practices and activities that range from taking notes in an archive or participating in a lab discussion to formal institutional processes of admission to a discipline.”¹¹

“This book is the effect of a fortuitous assemblage of friends, colleagues, interlocutors, and other things.”¹²

“When Rick died, he had nearly completed this, his fourth book dealing with response to student writing. In fact, several days after his death I received drafts of its introduction and the chapter that we were to write together about *Twelve Readers*, along with a note saying that he looked forward to my responses to each piece. My responses will have to stand as the final word since Rick left us before he could receive them. However, had he lived, those responses would have been only the beginning of our conversation about what the final product should be. To Rick, that’s what a teacher’s (or anyone’s) response should be: the beginning of a conversation. How I wish he had lived to continue that conversation with me!”¹³

“He would be remiss if he did not also mention Michelle Worley and the

other bartenders at The Cooker, who always poured him a mean cocktail when he needed one.”¹⁴

“The seed essay for this book, ‘In the House of Doing,’ was written in 2004 while I was on prednisone for an allergic reaction, and oddly, in 2012, at project’s end, I find myself again on prednisone.”¹⁵

“For nearly two years we wrestled with the issues and with ways to present our theories and our findings. I’m sure there were times when I became overbearing, when the authors’ temptation to snip the phone cord was enticing, delicious. But no one did.”¹⁶

“Kennan Ferguson has known me since I was nineteen years old, when I used to stomp around and say things like ‘Theory is crap.’ I cannot thank him enough for his companionship and support over decades.”¹⁷

“My wife, Colleen Connors, did not type or proofread a word of this book. But she knows who made it possible.”¹⁸

“Happily unmarried, I am grateful to my students and colleagues who don’t let me get by with much without challenging me.”¹⁹

“Some of my best intellectual inspiration comes from my friends outside academia and the creative worlds that they have built.”²⁰

NOTES

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| 1. Dobrin and Weisser vii. | 12. Bennett xxi. |
| 2. Lynn xi. | 13. Lunsford xii. |
| 3. Feldman x. | 14. Thelin v (in Tassoni and Thelin). |
| 4. Breuch ix. | 15. Rickert xxii. |
| 5. Bloom, <i>Composition</i> ix. | 16. Rose xii-xiii. |
| 6. Berman xi. | 17. Price vi. |
| 7. Brody xii. | 18. Connors x (<i>Composition-Rhetoric</i>). |
| 8. Bryant xiii. | 19. Appleby ix (in McCracken and Appleby). |
| 9. Rohan xii (in Kirsch and Rohan). | 20. Cvetkovich x. |
| 10. Haas xvii | |
| 11. Syverson xix. | |