

CONCLUSION.

A REFORMER'S LEGACY

While all the other pioneers in composition tended to move from the outside in, Murray moved from the inside out.

– Robert Root, “Donald Murray Remembered”

I imagined in the sixties that I would lead an army of writers into the academy, that they would take composition research and teaching seriously, and that they would be taken seriously. Together we would begin to understand how effective writing is made, and our new knowledge would change what we teach and how we teach it. . . . It's harder now that there is a body of scholarship, though, a canon guarded by high priests. The profession has no place for writers, and writers have no interest in the discipline that does not seem to relate to them or what they do. Writers are not taken seriously. Writing researchers do not think writers have anything to contribute. . . . I know of virtually no studies going on now on how people write. This is a personal disappointment to me.

– Donald Murray, “Mucking about in Language I Save My Soul: An Interview with Donald Murray”

I think that for me, what was so important was the feeling that we were democratizing writing. So, as opposed to writing being this skill that only a narrow subset of people have, writing is something that everybody has, or can have. I still think that was a great revolution.

– Thomas Newkirk, “Democratizing Writing: Reflections on The Great Revolution”

This book was born of the fear that Donald Murray's legacy in composition and rhetoric has been written by those who either didn't know him, didn't read him carefully, read him too selectively, or read him largely to advance their own agendas. I'm not the first to want to recover, resuscitate, and reclaim Murray, however. Other UNHers, in particular, have come before me. I stand on the shoulders of folks like Bruce Ballenger, Lad Tobin, Tom Newkirk, Donna Qualley, Bronwyn Williams and many other members of what I have called, elsewhere, my UNH “tribe” (Michaud, *Notes of a Native Son*). Writing in 2008, shortly after Murray's death, Tom Newkirk articulates the anger and frustration many of us have felt at the way Murray was so easily reduced to the *Donald Murray = Expressivist* frame and summarily dismissed. “I am unconvinced that Don's work can be so neatly aligned with a particular ideology,” Newkirk writes. “[Murray] appealed to a

huge range of writers, of varying political orientations. These writers appropriated from it [sic] what they needed.” He continues,

Now, after twenty years, “expressivism” has been part of the vocabulary of composition studies, a frequently used shorthand that dissolves the complex work of Murray and others into a compact position that in my view was never accurate in the first place. It can lead to intellectual reductiveness, to assertions that there really is this “rhetoric” that to my mind no thinking person would really subscribe to. It marginalizes and diminishes—to the point where I suspect Murray would be totally unknown to emerging professionals if *Cross-Talk* didn’t have a four-page essay, written in the early 1970s. My hope is that he might be given a second look, a good rereading. (“Donald Murray and the ‘Other Self’” 51)

Here, in addition to pushing back against the *Donald Murray = Expressivist* frame, Newkirk provides the exigence for the project I have pursued in these pages: to recover and reinterpret Murray. I have gone beyond “a good rereading,” however, turning to microhistory for my reclamation project. According to Ginzburg, “The specific aim of [microhistorical] research should be . . . The reconstruction of the relationship . . . between individual lives and the contexts in which they unfold” (Ginzburg qtd. in McComiskey 17). In these pages, I’ve tried to put these elements into conversation, situating the story of Murray’s individual life within the contexts—personal, institutional, professional, disciplinary—in which it unfolded. In so-doing, I’ve asked readers to move beyond the “grand narrative” of *Donald Murray = Expressivist* to a more nuanced understanding of Murray’s life, work, and contributions to our field, to conceive of him *not* as synonymous with a single approach to composition pedagogy but, rather, as a complex figure in our field’s disciplinary history whose efforts to reform the teaching of writing, the discipline of English, and the larger educational system of which both are a part should be understood and celebrated.

Of course, Murray didn’t set out in life to become a reformer. He set out to *write* and he spent a lifetime doing so. Once the opportunity to work for change presented itself to him in the early 1960s, however, he swam with the current, sometimes hesitantly and even, at times, reluctantly, but at a consistent and steady pace for the entirety of the second half of his career, through his retirement, and right up until his death. “Each time I sit down to write I don’t know if I can do it,” Murray wrote in the final column he published in the *Boston Globe* while still alive. “The flow of writing is always a surprise and a challenge. Click the computer on and I am 17 again, wanting to write and not knowing if I can” (“The Past Present and Future” C3).

Once in the reform current there was so much Murray wanted to change—about writing pedagogy, about English, about schools. It has taken me an entire book to try to articulate both *why* I believe he labored at this work for so long and *how* (and with whom) he went about it. Regarding the former, the *why*, as I have argued Murray's motivations were often personal, an act of "revenge," as he occasionally put it, on the teachers who "inspired [him] to drop out of high school twice before flunking out" (*My Twice-Lived Life* 32). Within the field of English, he conceived of reform, similarly, as a kind of revenge, but against English teachers and professors who enacted a version of the discipline that Murray understood to be not just mistaken in its conceptions about writing and writers but actually damaging to students trying to learn to write. Regarding the latter, the *how*, as we have seen Murray's process of working for pedagogical, educational, and disciplinary reform was anything but systematic. Around 1964, in response to a very local exigence at UNH, he put his head down to try to understand how his own writing process worked and to ask what implications an examination of this process might suggest for those who teach writing. From this effort flowed numerous arguments about writing and its teaching and, as we have seen, countless attempts at operationalizing these arguments in the form of specific reforms, on campus at UNH and beyond. But could Murray have imagined, in the summer of 1963, as he prepared to take a position as a faculty member and journalism instructor at his old alma mater, that five years later he would no longer be writing nonfiction articles for general interest audiences but, instead, writing about writing for school teachers? Could he have imagined, in the fall of 1971, when he assumed the directorship of Freshman English, that five years later he would be sought out by scholars in the emergent field of composition and rhetoric to deliver papers at research seminars? Could he have imagined, in the winter of 1978, when he stepped down as English Department chairman, that five years later (and almost twenty years after he had first begun to examine his own writing practices) a scholar trained in social science research methodologies would come to his house for 62 days to study his writing process and report on her findings in one of the field's major journals? Finally, could he have imagined, in 1986, when his article "One Writer's Secrets" was published as the lead piece in *College Composition and Communication*, that five years later an essay he penned for a special issue of the same journal would be relegated to the "Staffroom Interchanges" section (more on this in a moment)? No, Murray could not have imagined any of these developments before they happened, a fact which he acknowledges himself in a lovely passage from his memoir *My Twice-Lived Life*. Murray recalls the day his eldest daughter, nearing her college graduation, sat him and his wife down to ask how they had planned their lives. "We laughed and said that we had not planned our lives," Murray explains, "it was all an accident" (49). Later in the book he reflects, "In a lifetime I had moved

from being one of the dumb kids sitting in the back row, to standing behind the teacher's desk, to teaching teachers. I have, indeed, lived an unexpected life" (14).

MOVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

One of the most unexpected and unfortunate aspects of Murray's professional life seems to have been, as Robert Root put it in the first epigraph above, his movement in the late 1980s and 1990s from composition's "inside out." Murray spoke the words in the second epigraph, above, during an interview conducted with the journal *Writing on the Edge* (WOE) in 1993, five years out from his retirement from UNH. The words *disappointed* and *disappointment* appear frequently in the transcript. During a moment when Murray and the editors are discussing his feelings of alienation from the field he says, "I'm disappointed in what's happened but I'm not the least bit surprised. . . . When you professionalize inquiry, produce and hire professionals, you get professionals. I could not have been hired to replace myself when I retired, I didn't have the education" (13-14). Murray had not retired from composition and rhetoric but had come to feel that he *had been* retired by the field. Still, he was grateful for the changes that had made him obsolete. "I wanted people to do research in the teaching of writing," he explains. "I fought for our becoming a discipline" (14).

What Murray didn't want and what increasingly concerned him in his latter years were what he perceived to be the downsides of the field's evolution, one of which he felt personally and the other of which registered more as a professional concern. As we learned in the last chapter, Murray's "eccentric" speculations on the writing process were, as the eighties approached the nineties, no longer treated with the same level of seriousness as they once were by the field's new gatekeepers. "Scholars put me in a funny pigeon hole where I feel uncomfortable," he explains in his interviewers at WOE (13). To illustrate he offers an anecdote about a recent experience he'd had trying to place an article in one of the field's leading journals. Before eventually finding a home for the piece elsewhere, Murray explains, it was turned away from the first journal to which he submitted it for being "too Murrayesque" and rejected by the second, which, he reports, had invited the piece, for being "quaint" (29). "I wish my article was better written," Murray reflects on this incident, "that's normal enough for a writer—but it is not normal to wish his writing was dated, yesterday's news, old-fashioned, perhaps even what an article of mine was called in a recent journal rejection: 'quaint.' It is not. Not yet" ("Author's Postscript" 87).⁷⁵

75 As late as 1990, some in the field still found Murray's unique approach to composition scholarship useful. In a review of his edited collection *Expecting the Unexpected*, for example, Susan McLeod writes, "These essays illustrate what is most outstanding about Murray's work: he has

Beyond his feelings of personal disappointment, the changes in the field which stirred in Murray professional frustration stemmed from his sense that in its arc of disciplinary evolution, composition and rhetoric had shifted its primary research focus away from the kinds of inquiry and investigation into writing that he felt were most needed (i.e., studies of writers writing) and towards something else, what he calls, in one instance, “all the political and social issues that always surround writing” (“Author’s Postscript” 88). Ten years on from his stint as a “Lab Rat,” Murray reports that he was increasingly unable to find research reports that built on and extended his and Berkenkotter’s project in meaningful ways. “I would like to see close, precise examinations of the writing act,” he asserts in his interview with *WOE*. “How do people write? How do the best students write? In any class, whether you’re teaching in a prison or a remedial class in the inner city or rural schools, there are students in the class who write better than others. Where do they get their ideas? How do they revise? How much do they do in their head and on the paper?” (20). As we see here, Murray’s questions in 1993 hadn’t changed that much since 1963, and yet the field had changed a great deal. “Does the profession think that those questions have been answered,” the editors of *WOE* ask, “Or did it get frustrated with the difficulty of answering them?” Murray’s response reveals the depths of his frustrations at this time: “The profession today is not interested in writing. It is interested in grand ideas around writing, in political issues, in ethnographic issues—all valuable—not what happens when one word collides on the page and unexpected meaning is born.” Further, he adds, damningly, “I don’t think the profession tried to answer the questions enough to get frustrated” (21).

Acting on his disappointment and frustration, Murray never again published in a mainstream journal in the field following the 1991 publication of his essay “All Writing is Autobiography” in *CCC*. In a short retrospective piece he penned in 1993 for the journal *North Carolina English Teacher*, revisiting his 1977 article “Our Students Will Write—If We Let Them,” he writes, “The smaller, ‘less professional’ journals, such as *NCET*, that remain close to the public-school classroom, are the places where the profession is surviving. This is where I believe new research on how writers write and how students learn to write will be published” (88). In the dozen or so years that followed, Murray acted on this assertion, only placing his writing about writing in venues like *NCET* or in edited collections published by friends and colleagues in the greater UNH writing community. If those who wielded influence in composition and rhetoric’s halls of power no longer found his evangelizing compelling, Murray would look elsewhere for congregants.

the ability to engage us personally as he reveals his experiences in war, his pain at his daughter’s death, his joy and frustration and vulnerability in writing and in teaching writing. He may not be a researcher, but he is certainly a writer, and a splendid one. Our discipline is richer for the introspective accounts of his work” (418).

THE LABOR OF MINNIE MAE MURRAY

During the editorial review process for this book one reviewer noted, with curiosity, the following line, quoted in the last chapter, from Carol Berkenkotter's research report: "Mr. Murray spends much time making copious notes in a daybook, then dictates his drafts and partial drafts to his wife, who is an accomplished typist and partner in his work" (158). Like my reviewer, I have found much to scratch my head about in this formulation, beginning with the anachronism "an accomplished typist" and ending with the descriptor "partner." During my research, I, too, became curious about Minnie Mae Murray and her role in her husband's work. Was she more *typist* or more *partner*? A belated but much-needed word is in order here, as this book winds down, about the professional aspects of the Murrays relationship.

References and allusions to Minnie Mae can be found throughout Murray's writing and descriptions of her contributions to his work are recounted in numerous of his publications. Murray was, if nothing else, consistent in publicly recognizing, thanking, and praising his wife and in acknowledging her role in his work and success. In many instances in which he mentions Minnie Mae in his earliest UNH communications, it is to bemoan the uncompensated work she does for the university. In a seven-page rant to his department chairman about other matters, Murray pauses to go into some detail describing Minnie Mae's labors on behalf of the department and university:

Perhaps this is the time to bring up another question. Other faculty members of equivalent rank and energy and activity have secretaries. So do I. Perhaps she should be paid by the university. We have a large, well-equipped office established with private funds. Minnie Mae was an executive secretary who has a high professional price on her head. She spends many hours each day on university business. We have to hire people to do some of her housework for her so she can do this. A good share of what she does is administrative work for the university, another part of what she does is preparation for my courses, and another part, probably, is university sponsored research. . . . We have not worried about this, because her life is integrated with mine, and because we have not separated artificially the work I have done for the university and for myself. (Letter to Jack Richardson).

Murray's claim about Minnie Mae's unpaid contributions to UNH is corroborated in a report on the work of a general education committee on which

he served as secretary in the late 1960s, in a passage where the report's authors acknowledge the "Help of a different, but equally important" kind that committee members received, "from [their] families." Here, Minnie Mae, and *only* Minnie Mae, is named: "One wife, Minnie Mae Murray, did double duty by acting as secretary to the committee's secretary. Our excellent minutes were the labor—not always of love—of the Murrays" (Toward Unity Through Diversity).

Minnie Mae's contributions to Murray's work at the university were not confined to his service commitments, however. In an interview Murray gave late in his life, he provides a vivid illustration of the extent of her contributions to his writing and research. "The first draft of *Write to Learn* was written as we drove from New Hampshire to Kentucky to see Minnie Mae's mother," Murray recalls. "Minnie Mae had a typewriter in front of her on a little desk in the van and I dictated all of it" (Boe and Marting 8). Further, as we learned from Berkenkotter, Murray's "distinctive work habits" (159) were both unusual for an academic and highly collaborative.⁷⁶ He wrote extensive notes in his journal or "daybook" and then dictated early drafts to Minnie Mae (sometimes, apparently, in the car, on vacations). Once a draft was completed, Murray read it aloud to determine whether it should be copy-edited and published or whether he needed to return to his daybook to consider more substantial revisions.⁷⁷ If the latter, there was more work, yet, for Minnie Mae Murray to do.⁷⁸

While Murray never quite goes into detail on the specifics of Minnie Mae's intellectual contributions to his work, it's clear from statements he makes in various places that she was, in the end, more *partner* than *typist*. In a 1964 letter proposing story ideas to his editor at *Reader's Digest* Murray writes, "I think I would be a far more efficient reporter and writer if I were able to move right into

76 Coming to higher education from private industry, as Murray did, it's not entirely surprising that he would have grown accustomed to writing by dictation. Further, throughout his life Murray struggled with spelling and so, in an era before the advent of spell and/or grammar checkers, having Minnie Mae type up his early drafts likely saved time and ensured correctness. For her part, administrative work was nothing new to Minnie Mae as she had served, according to her obituary, as a secretary to the scientific advisor to the Secretary of War during World War II (and, in so doing, had earned the nation's highest security clearance!). ("Minnie Mae")

77 If the document he was writing covered ideas Murray had already rehearsed in speeches, seminars, or workshops, Berkenkotter reports, the writing process went fairly quickly. In just a draft or two Murray had a relatively polished copy. If, however, Murray was breaking new conceptual ground, covering previously unexplored terrain, the process was more laborious and plodding, with multiple iterations of drafting/dictating/typing, reading/rethinking, drafting/dictating/typing, reading/rethinking, and so on.

78 According to Tom Newkirk, once word processors came on the scene in the 1980s, Murray abandoned dictation and took to the keyboard to handle typing his manuscripts himself (Email Correspondence, 12/6/22).

the area where I am reporting. I would have my office and my secretary-researcher (my wife) with me.” Later in this letter he writes, “My wife is a good reporter, and so am I. As we travel the country we would inevitably come up with story ideas, far more than we could ever utilize.” (Letter to James Monahan). Here, Minnie Mae is named as both a *researcher* and a *reporter*, terms that suggest the nature of her partnership with her husband prior to and during the early years of his transition to college teaching. Given Murray’s lone-wolf status when he worked as a freelancer, we should perhaps not be surprised at such a partnership and it was likely during those years that, as Murray put it above, Minnie Mae’s professional life became “integrated” with his.

On the dedications and acknowledgments pages of Murray’s many books we learn about additional roles Minnie Mae played in his work. In *A Writer Teaches Writing*, for example, he acknowledges Minnie Mae’s contributions, which, he reports, “go far beyond the chore of typing and re-typing and re-typing . . .” (xiv). In the Preface of *Learning by Teaching*, Murray is more expansive on the support Minnie Mae provided him, of the emotional sort:

Most of all, I appreciate the support of my wife, Minnie Mae, to whom all of these pieces have been dictated, not once, but many times. She is the one who has seen the despair caused by all the false drafts, and if it were not for her support, that’s all there would be, just early drafts of articles I would some day hope to write.

Did Minnie Mae go beyond emotional support to make intellectual contributions to Murray’s work? In the dedication for his book *Writing for Your Readers* he deploys a term, *reader*, which suggests she surely did. “For my First Reader, Minnie Mae,” he writes. The term appears again years later in Minnie Mae’s obituary (which, I speculate, Murray wrote), in a passage in which Minnie Mae is described as “her husband’s first reader and first editor.” The term *reader*, or, more specifically, *first reader*, suggests that Minnie Mae played an important intellectual role in her husband’s work. On the one hand, the term could be interpreted literally, as in, she was the first to read his work because she was typing it. On the other hand, *first reader* suggests a more expansive role, as we designate as *first reader* those individuals whose opinions and judgments we value most. My sense is that Murray intended the latter.

In *Write to Learn*, beyond again dedicating the book to Minnie Mae (“without her there would be no books”), Murray describes his wife as his “closest colleague and strongest supporter” (xiv). It’s a long way from *typist* to *colleague*. To be clear, though, it was Berkenkotter who gave us *typist*, and while Murray occasionally used this term himself he also, as we have seen, used numerous other

terms to describe Minnie Mae's contributions to his work: *researcher, reporter, reader, colleague, supporter*.^{79 80} So where does all this leave us on the questions that prompted this brief inquiry into the professional partnership of Don and Minnie Mae Murray?

I think we can say, first, that if we place the Murrays' collaborations within the context of their times they're probably not all that unusual or surprising. Second, we should probably acknowledge and understand Minnie Mae's work for her husband (and the university) as a likely extension of the professional relationship they established prior to the time when Murray transitioned to college teaching. After nine years of working together during Murray's freelance period it must have been fairly easy to continue in this capacity once Murray joined the faculty at UNH (and may even have been necessary, so that Murray could take on the speaking and consulting gigs necessary to earn the additional income the family needed to pay the bills). Third, though, I think that we can acknowledge that when viewed through the lens of our own contemporary moment, the Murrays' work relationship feels problematic. As a twentieth century cisgen white male, Murray worked from a position of considerable privilege... and then he also had a wife to support him, providing free labor for numerous years. All of these conclusions feel valid. Most significant, though, is the fact that the Murrays remained married, and happily so, by all accounts, until Minnie Mae's death in 2005. Whatever we might say about it, their professional work arrangement seems to have worked for them.

DEMOCRATIZING WRITING

Donald Murray came to UNH in 1963 with two novels under his belt and a

79 And to this list one can also add *caterer, hostess, and chef*; as the Murrays frequently entertained faculty and students at their home and Minnie Mae, of course, organized and presided over such gatherings. Such was the extent of Minnie Mae's culinary competence, in fact, that she was sometimes named in Murray's teaching evaluations (asked to comment on the aspects of the course that were the most successful, one student points to "Minnie Mae's cooking").

80 Towards the end of her life, Minnie Mae played a final, significant role in her husband's work: *muse*. While Murray set out in his *Boston Globe* column, initially, to document his own aging process his reporting took a more focused turn in the 1990s when Minnie Mae was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. At this time Murray became her full-time caregiver and his writing increasingly charted the challenges of caring for a partner with a debilitating and life-altering condition. As such, especially during the early years of her illness, Minnie Mae became something of a minor celebrity among Murray's *Boston Globe* readers. "When her husband gave readings," Minnie Mae's obituary notes, "the audiences were most interested in seeing Minnie Mae." True or not, it's clear that throughout his career Minnie Mae played an essential role in Murray's accomplishments and success.

contract for a third in hand. He never published that third novel, but it wasn't for lack of trying. Five or so years into his time at the university, as he drafted and field-tested *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Murray was still at work on the third novel, for which, he reports, he still had a contract ("Faculty Annual Report, 1967-68"). A few years later, in 1970, as the list of his publications and speaking engagements in the area of writing and pedagogy grew, Murray provides the following update in his annual report on the novel-in-progress: "developed conceptually, but not close to publication. Hope for completion in 1971." While this hope did not come to fruition, as we learn from Murray's 1973-74 annual report, the novel at least now had a name, *The Ghosting of Manton Blake*, and while it is listed third in order of significance under his Professional and Scholarly Activities, it is, Murray explains in the report, his "principal writing project at the moment." The following year, however, we learn that the novel was still unfinished. The update: "Since the last report I have written approximately 80,000 words on a draft of a novel. This draft has been reconsidered and largely abandoned, but it is an essential part of the novel in progress, which I have reconsidered and reorganized."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, progress on the third novel slowed during the years Murray served as department chairman. Further, it was at this time that he drifted further away from more mainstream forms of writing, gaining greater attention among composition researchers as he experimented with more social scientific modes of composing. In a 1977 sabbatical request, however, Murray indicates that if granted leave he hopes to devote much of his time and energy to completing the novel "for which I have a contract and which I have delayed by serving as chairperson." And then, happily, in a report for the year 1977-78, Murray indicates that he now has "a firm outline for the entire work" and "should be able to fill in that outline during this academic year." The following year, for the first time, the novel, now entitled *Ghosting*, is listed as "Completed" in Murray's Annual Report.

Completed, but apparently not publishable, for *Ghosting* receives no mention again in Murray's Annual Reports until 1983. "4th and final draft to be delivered Spring 1983," he writes, but elsewhere in his report he indicates that he's now at work on another project, called *My Military History of the Twentieth Century*. In the years that followed, Murray appears to have ghosted *Ghosting* because the book does not appear again in his reports, replaced, now, by frequent references to *My Military History*, for which, he explains in 1988, he has both a contract and five completed chapters. Among his goals for 1990, he writes, is to finish *My Military History* (Annual Report of Don Murray for 1988). And yet, even though there is ample evidence in his archive that Murray continued to labor on "the novel" from 1990 until his death in 2006, he never finished it or, if he did, never published it.

It was very *unMurrayesque* for Murray not to finish something he had started, especially if it was in the realm of writing. "I [first] came to the University as

an out-of-state student because of the artistic climate created by Carroll [Towle],” Murray explained in a profile published in the UNH student newspaper in 1964. “I came back to enjoy the same climate” (“I Have to Write” 10). While the climate was not, ultimately, hospitable for Murray to write and publish fiction it did prove amenable for other kinds of creative writing, mainly poetry. Beginning around 1970 or so, Murray began (or resumed) writing poems and was soon placing them in both mainstream publications like *The New York Times* and literary journals like *The Southern Poetry Review*. “I have completed 23 poems this year, which are being submitted for publication,” he writes in the spring of 1975 (“Faculty Annual Report, 1974-75”). Virtually every year thereafter similar such announcements followed. “Twenty-eight poems completed, ready to be sent out at year end,” he writes in 1988. The writing (and publishing) of poems, it seems, was more conducive to Murray’s frantic, even manic, pace once he began to work towards disciplinary and educational reform.

Why did Murray continue to labor at fiction and poetry long after his bread and butter had become writing about writing? One possible answer is that throughout his life Murray never confined himself to just one type of writing. He got his start penning simple news stories, advanced to editorial writing, and it was for this that he won the Pulitzer Prize. In the fifties and early sixties, he made a living writing features for general interest magazines and then, of course, in the late sixties and early seventies he transitioned into a kind of hybrid academic/essayistic genre of writing that earned him tenure and promotion and a name for himself in the emergent field of composition and rhetoric. In the seventies and eighties, Murray labored to try to find ways to continue to contribute his ideas to the evolving field, often in the form of a kind of quasi-social scientific genre of writing, but he also wrote the occasional newspaper piece and briefly returned to long-form journalism before signing on to become a columnist at *The Boston Globe* (he wrote textbooks, as well, during this period). For the final twenty or so years of his life Murray frequently wrote autobiography, publishing two memoirs and countless columns about his major themes: family and childhood, school and war, parenting and aging. In sum, one answer to the question of why Murray kept writing “creatively” is that there was never really a time in his life when Murray produced just one kind of writing. He always wore many writerly hats and thought of all writing as creative.

A second possible answer to the question is more personal, though. Throughout his life but especially during his formative years, Murray dreamed of becoming a capital “W” Writer and it was this, specifically, as we have seen, that he had initially set out to accomplish when he signed on to teach at UNH. We should not be surprised, then, that Murray continued to pursue this goal during his years on the faculty, even as more immediate academic projects drew him further and further from it. We should also not be surprised to find that Murray

sometimes struggled to come to terms with the trade-offs he was making as he pursued these unanticipated writerly projects. “My credentials are certainly not academic, and neither are my ambitions,” he wrote to a friend circa 1970, seven years into his new life as a college professor. “I still want to be a writer-writer, not a writer-about-writing” (Letter to Mr. Walter Holden). The following year, in a brief personal reflection on his career, Murray opens with the following: “In my mind I am a writer and a teacher of writing—in that order” (Professional Reflection). Finally, in a lengthy, meandering letter written around this same time to his friend and sponsor at NESDEC Dick Goodman, Murray acknowledges his feelings most directly: “Probably I should confess something that is hard to understand. I can not accept the writing I do about writing—the books, articles, and programs—as writing. I should, but I can not” (Letter to Richard Goodman).

In his late-life book *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem*, Murray blames his English professors for instilling in him an outlook that assigns greater prestige to so-called “creative” forms of writing. “When I was in college, my professors preached an aesthetic pyramid of literature: poetry at the peak, fiction and drama below, nonfiction at the bottom,” he writes. Sadly he “bought it,” he admits (55). He learned to value certain genres more than others. And yet there were likely other factors at work, as well, in Murray’s allegiance to “an aesthetic pyramid of literature.” Murray came of age during a period of great American literary accomplishment. Fitzgerald. Hemingway. Faulkner. Steinbeck. All men, like Murray. All white, like Murray. Some even served in wars or as journalists, as Murray had. It would have been difficult for an aspiring young writer of Murray’s generation *not* to get caught up in the mythology of these men, these Great American Writers. It’s likely, then, that Murray’s inability to give up on creative forms of writing, to give up on the “novel,” was not just about what his professors had taught him. Prior to coming to college Murray had already cultivated a writerly persona that was not easily surrendered and this, too, is likely part of the reason why he kept at his novel (and his poems) well past the point at which he had become known, principally, as a writer teaching writing. One does not give up on a long-held and deeply internalized identity just because one changes jobs. Writing novels and poems was identify-fulfillment for Murray, the dream of Writerly fame an unattainable goal whose sole purpose became its pursuit.

As the scales of Murray’s life unexpectedly rebalanced in the sixties and seventies, he had pursued a new writerly goal—democratizing writing, as Thomas Newkirk has put it. Making writers out of ordinary folks, and not just a Writer out of himself. In *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Murray writes,

The writer may be a novelist, a salesman, a lawyer, a historian,
a member of the League of Women Voters, an engineer, a

journalist, a general, a philosopher, a politician, an advertising copywriter, a union official, a businessman, a scientist. Those categories simply identify the material he has to communicate, they do not indicate whether he is a writer or not. The man who creates an effective memo is as much a writer as the man who produces an effective sonnet. (1)

The notion that “the man who creates an effective memo” is “as much a writer” as “the man who produces an effective sonnet” can be seen as a kind of democratic counterargument or response to what Murray felt were elitist mythologies about writing and writers that had long been perpetuated by non-writers, and especially English teachers and professors, including at UNH. Murray addresses this issue head on in the first edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing* where he writes, “I endeavor to show the students as I write with them that writing is not magic, but work.” He continues: “The writer does not put on a velvet smoking jacket, pick up a quill pen and let God direct his hand across the page” (21). Elsewhere, he aims his arguments more directly at those whom he believes peddle the fiction that writers are a special class of people and writing a special kind of skill. “When we teach writing we do our students a disservice if we allow them to think that writing is a mystery. Writing is not a magic possessed only by the high priests of the English Department” (*Instructor's Manual . . . Write to Learn* 23). Regular people, Murray argued, striking a dagger into the dark heart of the rhetoric of liberal culture, could become writers, and he offered his own life as evidence for this claim. To my way of thinking there is no more important contribution that Donald Murray made to our field than this—his tireless effort to deputize all of us, including and especially our students, as writers.

To be sure, and as we have seen in these pages, Murray gave us many useful things: maps of the composing process; a vision of writing as a problem-solving activity; an understanding of writing development as a process of lifelong learning; advocacy for the importance of explicit reflection in the teaching of writing; an inductive, listening-based, response-oriented approach to composition pedagogy; arguments for the legitimacy of composition within English; an appreciation for the importance of productive failure in learning to write; and a vision of teaching and learning grounded in joy, pleasure, discovery, curiosity, and surprise. It was Murray's willingness to line up his considerable ethos as a Pulitzer Prize winner behind the notion that writing could be learned and practiced by anyone willing to try, however, that is, I believe, his most enduring legacy.

The irony, of course, is that the enormous amount of time Murray spent trying to democratize writing, to show us not just that the identity of writer was *possible* but that it was *desirable* and even *attainable*, was time he didn't spend

Conclusion

becoming the Writer of his dreams. In trying to make writers of us all, Murray largely forfeited his own Writerly ambitions. Or, perhaps he didn't. Perhaps he eventually came to believe the truth of his own words: a man who creates an effective memo . . . or a revolutionary academic article, successful workshop presentation, groundbreaking textbook, innovative curriculum series, or helpful instructor's manual *is* as much a Writer as the man who produces an effective sonnet.

One can hope so.