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Reconstructing Childhood via Reimagined Memories: Life Writing in Children's Literature

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Abstract: For authors who revisit their experiences of childhood to write stories for young readers, imaginatively drawing on memories plays a prominent role in the creative process. Whereas connections between memories and narratives have featured in literary studies and children's literature studies, the unfolding of negotiations between memory and imagination as authors create narratives of life writing is underexplored. This article examines how negotiations of memory and imagination unfold on paper during the writing processes for Roald Dahl's *Boy* (1984), David Almond's *Counting Stars* (2000), and Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014). While positioning itself in the field of cognitive literary studies and the archival study of creative writing processes, this article aims to generate insights on the reconstructive approach to memory, which considers episodic remembering as imagining the past. By transposing the study of the dynamics of writing processes, or genetic criticism, to children's literature, I explore notes, mindmaps, manuscripts, and typescripts held at the archives of Dahl, Almond, and Woodson to chart how they imaginatively incorporate memories of their youth into their life writing. As such, this research informs understandings of the narrative genesis of the authors' works, while drawing on the manifestations of their literary creativity in an attempt to broaden knowledge regarding memory and imagination.

Keywords: memory; imagination; life writing; children's literature; cognitive literary studies; archives; genetic criticism

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1. Introduction

If I were to give you a pen and a piece of paper, and if I were to ask you to write down one of your childhood memories, which memory would you choose? And how much of that memory would be correct, and how much of it would be you, filling in the gaps on the basis of your imagination? Of life at four years old, Joshua Rothman (2022, n. pag.) recalls "the red-painted nails of a mean babysitter; the brushed-silver stereo in [his] parents' apartment; a particular orange-carpeted hallway; some houseplants in the sun; and a glimpse of [his] father's face, perhaps smuggled into memory from a photograph", yet he bemoans that he has no memories of his "feelings, thoughts, or personality" at that age. It is these feelings, thoughts, and personalities that authors of children's literature sometimes seek when writing books for young readers. While surely not all children's literature is based on childhood memories, many adult authors who write for younger audiences have testified to drawing on memories from youth to write engaging stories (Joosen 2022). One of the core questions in the field of children's literature studies revolves around how such authors creatively draw on childhood memories to write books for young people (Hollindale [1997] 2001, pp. 62–75; Joosen 2023). After all, adult authors experience a temporal distance from the past experiences of their youth.

By transposing the study of writing processes, or genetic criticism, to forms of life writing in children's literature, this article explores literary creativity spanning memory and imagination. It delves into how authors of children's literature negotiate memories and

imaginative storytelling during the writing process. Life writing, as Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir explains, "can be said to always contain both autobiographical and fictional aspects" (2003, p. 5). Moreover, authors negotiate the ways in which both autobiographical and fictional aspects are yoked together during the writing process (Gudmundsdóttir 2003, p. 5). To study such negotiations, this article engages in a first foray of notes, mindmaps, manuscripts, and typescripts in the archives of Roald Dahl, David Almond, and Jacqueline Woodson, who are all award-winning and critically acclaimed authors of children's literature. By charting how these authors imaginatively incorporate memories of their youth into their life writing for young readers, I study how negotiations of memory and imagination unfold on paper during the writing processes for Dahl's ([1984] 2016) *Boy*, Almond's (2000) *Counting Stars*, and Woodson's (2014a) *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

The faculties of memory and imagination are closely interwoven in our brains (Josselyn and Tonegawa 2020). As Philip Gerrans explains, when the neural circuitry that governs episodic memory is impaired, the faculty of imagination is likewise damaged (2014, p. 70). The evidence supporting this view is that damage to neural pathways connected with episodic memory (i.e., recollections of past personal experiences) likewise impairs imagination (Gerrans 2014). The "story" of episodic memory is told by Endel Tulving in "Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain": he describes it is "a true marvel of nature" (Tulving 2002, p. 3). Whereas episodic memory is defined as "the recollection of a specific episode tied to its spatiotemporal context", semantic memory covers "a dynamic collection of general knowledge of facts and concepts that are disconnected from the place and time of initial learning" (Ngo et al. 2024, p. 2). For example, one's recollection of a particularly striking sunset experienced during a holiday in Rome two years ago, i.e., episodic memory, differs greatly from one's knowledge of Rome as the capital city of Italy, i.e., semantic memory. Both episodic and semantic forms of memory can be traced in the writing materials of the authors discussed in this article, although there is much debate as to the distinctions and overlap between these memory systems (De Brigard et al. 2022).

Aside from being closely interwoven in our brains, the faculties of memory and imagination also share a joint foundation in narrative (Gerrans 2014, pp. 66–70). When we remember a past event, or imagine a particular sensation, we often rely on narrative elements and storytelling. Whereas connections between memories and narratives have featured in literary studies (Harris 1989; Bal et al. 1999; Nalbantian 1994, 2003; Hansen 2015; Zunshine 2022a) and children's literature studies (Hollindale [1997] 2001; Latham 2006; Johnston 2014; Waller 2017; Nikolajeva 2018; Joosen 2023), the unfolding of negotiations between memory and imagination as authors create narratives is underexplored. Furthermore, Helma van Lierop-Debrauwer (2021a) has called attention to the fact that children's literature authors writing about their own lives have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve.

To address this, I will first draw on a multidisciplinary framework that spans cognitive literary studies, life writing, and the archival study of creative writing processes to generate insights on the reconstructive approach to memory, which considers remembering as imagining the past (De Brigard 2017, pp. 137–38). The second part of this article will expand on reconstructive memory, which regards the simulation of past experiences and the simulation of future events as both being forms of "mental time travel" involving narrative elements (Gerrans 2014, pp. 66–70). By researching mental time travel as it manifests itself on paper, the third part of this article examines how Dahl's, Almond's, and Woodson's experiences of youth feature in their writing materials. It also examines how memories can be identified in writing materials and in which ways these memories can be discussed in relation to imaginative elements of storytelling, thereby commenting on the fine line in such writings between fiction and nonfiction.

By studying the writing processes of Dahl, Almond, and Woodson across versions of their life writing and across versions of how they imaginatively recall their childhood, we can come to better understandings of the narrative genesis of the authors' works. After all, as Dirk Van Hulle points out, a writer can no longer be considered as "a monolithic self",

but rather as a "succession of selves" (2022, p. 11). Karen Sánchez-Eppler (2013, p. 213) draws comparisons between the study of writing materials in archives and the study of childhood, pointing out that "in many ways, for each of us, childhood is the archive, a treasure box of the formative and the forgotten", and this is especially so for adult authors who draw on their experiences of childhood to write stories for readers much younger than themselves.

2. Cognitive Literary Studies, Life Writing, and the Archival Study of Creative Writing Processes

This article focuses on literary works of life writing about youth, using a cognitive lens. By bringing cognitive literary studies together with approaches that focus on the materiality of writing, researchers such as Marco Bernini (2014), Dirk Van Hulle (2014), Karin Kukkonen (2023), and Emma-Louise Silva (2023) study notes, letters, drafts, and so on, while drawing on insights from philosophy of mind and cognitive science. The field of creative cognition, then, zooms in on authors' creative practices from a cognitive perspective (Finke et al. 1992; Arnavas 2021), examining authors' embodied interactions with their writing materials and considering how authors' surroundings can have an impact on their literary creativity. Furthermore, when it comes to cognitive literary approaches and the genre of life writing specifically, important work has been done by Lisa Zunshine and Laura Otis. Zunshine has studied Christa Wolf's archive in Berlin in order to examine "how memories become literature" (2022a, p. 92) in Wolf's book *Patterns of Childhood*, while Otis (2022) has examined sensory simulation and how memoirists move readers to experience multi-modal sensations during the reading process of works of life writing.

Life writing is an umbrella term for genres such as memoir, semi-autobiographical stories, autofiction, and *romans à clef* (Gudmundsdóttir 2003; Leader 2015). Zunshine (2022b, p. 4) describes the term of life writing as covering a broad range of genres, "from the bildungsroman and autobiographical novel on the more 'literary' end to memoirs of particular life experiences that seek to avoid literary styling as part of their commitment to unadorned truth". The books discussed in this article can all be placed under the header of life writing in children's literature and have been referred to as belonging to genres such as "memoir of childhood" in the case of *Boy* (Sturrock 2017, p. xv; see also Pinsent 2012, p. 70), "autobiographical short-story collection" (Coghlan 2014, p. 86) or "fictionalised autobiographical work" (Dunbar 2014, p. 124) in the case of *Counting Stars*, and "memoir in free verse" in the case of *Brown Girl Dreaming* (van Lierop-Debrauwer 2021b, p. 107). Helga Schwalm explains in her discussion of autobiography and life writing that the term autobiography is often used interchangeably with the term of life writing, which denotes "all modes and genres of telling one's own life", thereby pointing out that although life writing genres aim to tell the story of a "real" person, "it is inevitably constructive, or imaginative, in nature and as a form of textual 'self-fashioning' ultimately resists a clear distinction from its fictional relatives (autofiction, autobiographical novel), leaving the generic borderlines blurred" (Schwalm 2014, p. 14). The strands of memories and imagination that are interwoven throughout Dahl's, Almond's, and Woodson's stories lead to a level of ambiguity when it comes to discerning what is real and what is imagined. Yet, as Adam Foulds rightly notes:

> I think that our gradings of reality and fiction are rather like our bipedal locomotion—learnt naturally, our second nature—but when analysed by roboticists or literary critics found to be dismayingly complex and subtle. Nevertheless, we persist in remaining upright and walking about. (Foulds 2015, p. 104)

This article focuses on researching the creative writing processes of children's literature authors, raising questions in relation to the temporal negotiations of drawing on the past in a very specific form of literature, namely, "the only major category of literature that is generally written by one group (adults) for another group (children)" (Bernstein 2020, p. 879; see also Rose [1984] 1993). Studying the writing traces of authors' creative processes and the narrative genesis of their books makes it possible to read practices of composition and

revision, to follow the decision-making process, and to look into variants of the published texts. Studies of the genesis of works of literature are informed by genetic criticism (Debray-Genette 1977; De Biasi and Wassenaar 1996). Genetic criticism explores the dynamics of creative processes as stories unfold, version by version, on paper, or in notes and drafts, in sketchbooks and mindmaps, and in manuscripts, typescripts, and proofs (Van Hulle 2014, 2022; Ferrer 2023; Silva 2023). By delving into the remnants of the creative process for the books in the proposed corpus and examining the writing materials at hand in archives, we can look into entanglements between writers and their writing materials, which reveal the importance of the transfer of thoughts to paper during the creative process, especially for "authors who are developing their thoughts while they are writing" (Silva 2022; see also Menary 2007; Bernini 2014).

Vanessa Joosen's (2017) "The Genetic Study of Children's Literature" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature* has shown what genetic criticism could mean for children's literature studies. Furthermore, researchers such as Kenneth Kidd (2011), Emily Murphy (2014), Kristopher McKie and Pearson (2019), Andrea Davidson (2021), Lois Burke (2022), and Helen King (2022) have provided insights into how archival research can enrich children's literature studies. However, there is still much work to be done, and the methodologies of genetic criticism could prompt a wave of research by promoting studies into versions of stories that revolve around past life stages in life writing, and into the general examination of *avant-textes*, or "all the documents that come before a work when it is considered a *text* and when those documents and the text are considered as part of a system" (Deppman et al. 2004, p. 8, italics in original). Aside from *avant-textes*, this article will also delve into paratexts, which can be situated outside the books, in interviews, for example, taking the form of "public authorial epitexts" or paratextual utterances (Genette [1987] 1997, pp. 344–70). Paratextual information can also be found inside books, in the form of dedications, epigraphs, author's notes, words of thanks, photographs, and so on (Genette [1987] 1997). All these manifestations of literary creativity can help in understanding the writing processes of Roald Dahl, David Almond, and Jacqueline Woodson, especially when it comes to the ways in which they navigate forms of reconstructive memory in their writing materials.

3. Reconstructive Memory

In reconstructive considerations of memory as discussed in the philosophy of memory and cognitive science, remembering can be understood as a form of recreative or simulative imagining (Gerrans 2014; Michaelian 2016; Hutto and Myin 2017). In other words, remembering is regarded as imagining the past, and can be considered as "memorial fabulation" (Chambers 2001, p. 17), "imaginative compilation" (Sutton 2010, p. 30), "imaginative reconstruction" (Fernyhough 2012, p. 8), or as a remix. After all, recalling personal past experiences is more in line with a remix than a rewind and play process. When we remember, our past experiences are reactivated, and every time we remix a past experience, it gets influenced by our immediate situation, framed by the experiential present, or, as Daniel Schacter writes, "we often edit or entirely rewrite our previous experiences in light of what we now know or believe" (Schacter [2001] 2021, p. 7).

Linked to this temporal understanding of memory, Philip Gerrans (2014, p. 70) and Felipe De Brigard (2017, pp. 137–38) underscore that episodic memory and episodic future thinking are processes that rely on the same reconstructive neural systems. According to Gerrans, the reconstructive approach to episodic memory regards the simulation of past experiences along similar lines as the simulation of possible future events (2014, pp. 66–70). Viewed from the literary optic, Charles Fernyhough explains that "as many artists have noted, memory underpins imagination. Creating new artistic and intellectual works depends critically on the reshaping of what has gone before" (2012, p. 5). These findings that closely link acts of remembering with acts of imagining prompt my investigations of imagination and creativity in relation to the fiction-writing endeavors of children's literature authors who imaginatively recreate their childhood experiences in their books.

Although David Herman (2009) points out that literary "mind-relevance" can be examined at the level of authors, characters, and readers alike, and despite the fact that some studies have engaged with authors (Bernini 2014; Van Hulle 2014; Zunshine 2022a; Silva 2022), there are still gaps in our knowledge in terms of how "narrative across versions" (Bernaerts and Van Hulle 2013), "genetic narratology" (Van Hulle 2022), "cognitive-archival inquiry" (Zunshine 2022a), and "cognitive-genetic narratology" (Silva 2023) can broaden insights when it comes to the functioning of human memory and imagination. In what follows, I will discuss examples of how Dahl, Almond, and Woodson move between memories and imagination during the writing process.

4. The Paper Traces of Mental Time Travel: Roald Dahl, David Almond, and Jacqueline Woodson

As mentioned above, Dahl, Almond, and Woodson are all critically acclaimed and award-winning authors: Dahl was the "British Book Awards' Children's Author of the Year" in 1990 and won a "Smarties Award" that same year, and both Almond and Woodson have been awarded the "Hans Christian Andersen Award", or the "Nobel Prize for children's literature", in 2010 and 2020, respectively. All three authors hearken back to the geographical locations and contexts of their youth in the studied books: Dahl's *Boy* is situated in various locations from his childhood in Wales, England, and Norway, within a time frame spanning the 1920s and 1930s. Almond's short story collection *Counting Stars* is situated in the 1950s and 1960s in the North of England, where the author grew up, with a particular focus on the area of Tyneside and Newcastle, including depictions of cultural identity in the Northeast of England. Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* features locations such as Columbus in Ohio, Greenville in South Carolina, and New York City, while reflecting on the author's experiences growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement (Torres 2024).

All three authors were (in the case of Almond—almost) in their fifties and sixties when these particular books were published: Dahl was sixty-eight, Almond was forty-nine, and Woodson was fifty-one. While Dahl and Almond write about experiences they had when they were six to seven years old and onwards into their teens, Woodson opens *Brown Girl Dreaming* with the day of her birth, as recalled by various family members. *Boy*, *Counting Stars*, and *Brown Girl Dreaming* depict themes of coming of age while navigating fluctuating surroundings, such as those linked to topics of family, friendship, school, religion, death, and relocating. Furthermore, Dahl, Almond, and Woodson incorporate paratextual reflections on how and why they tapped into their childhood and adolescent memories to create children's literature by including dedications, epigraphs, afterwords, family trees, photographs, and so on, in their published books. What makes these authors especially interesting for the present study is that they draw on experiences situated in their childhood and use such past experiences of youth as material to work with in an imaginative way.

4.1. Roald Dahl's Boy: "Skim Them off the Top of My Consciousness and Write Them Down"

Roald Dahl (1916–1990) wrote *Boy* because of experiences that "made such a tremendous impression on him" ([1984] 2016). The author explains at the beginning of the book:

> This is not an autobiography. I would never write a history of myself. On the other hand, throughout my young days at school and just afterwards a number of things happened to me that I have never forgotten (. . .) I didn't have to search for any of them. All I had to do was skim them off the top of my consciousness and write them down. Some are funny. Some are painful. Some are unpleasant. I suppose that it why I have always remembered them so vividly. All are true. ([1984] 2016)

The draft material for *Boy* can be found at The Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre in Great Missenden (UK), which is home to Dahl's (Dahl 1984–1988) archive, featuring manuscripts, typescripts, proofs, photographs, letters, reviews, and memorabilia. The

archive contains Dahl's literary and personal papers, which were first stored in his garden hut before the documents were moved to the museum.

On the first page of the first draft of *Boy*, dating from 1984, Dahl included the following sentence as a short preface that comments on experiences that happened to him during his youth: "Each of them, even after a lapse of fifty and sometimes sixty years, has remained seared on my memory" (RD022301-1). Being able to recall experiences we had fifty or sixty years ago involves quite some "mental time travel" (Gerrans 2014, pp. 66–70), and this across the life span. "Skim[ming] [a number of things] off the top of [one's] consciousness" (Dahl [1984] 2016, n. pag.) does not quite do justice to Dahl's creative process. In fact, the second (Figure 1) and third (Figure 2) pages of the first draft of *Boy* feature a list that counts as Dahl's preliminary try out for a table of contents. This list is then altered slightly in the following draft (Figure 3):

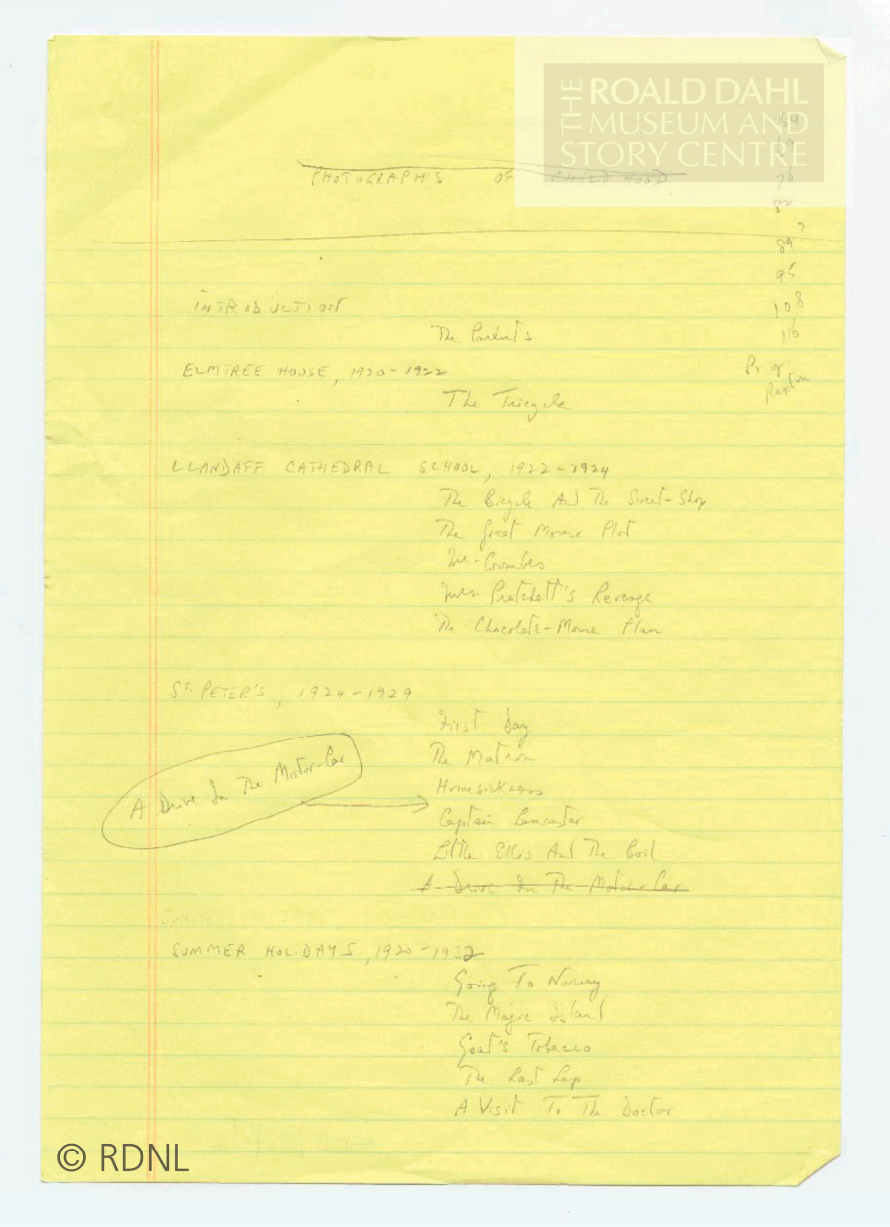


Figure 1. RD022301-2.

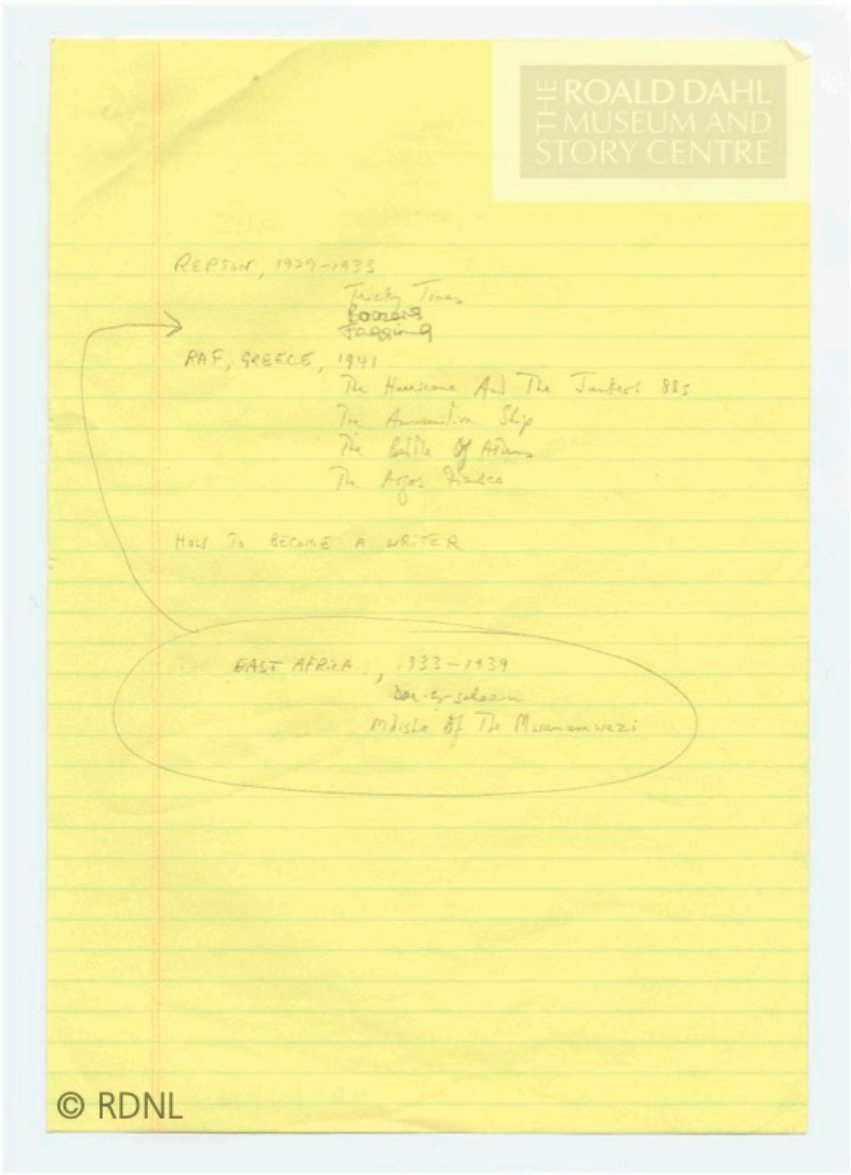


Figure 2. RD022301-3.

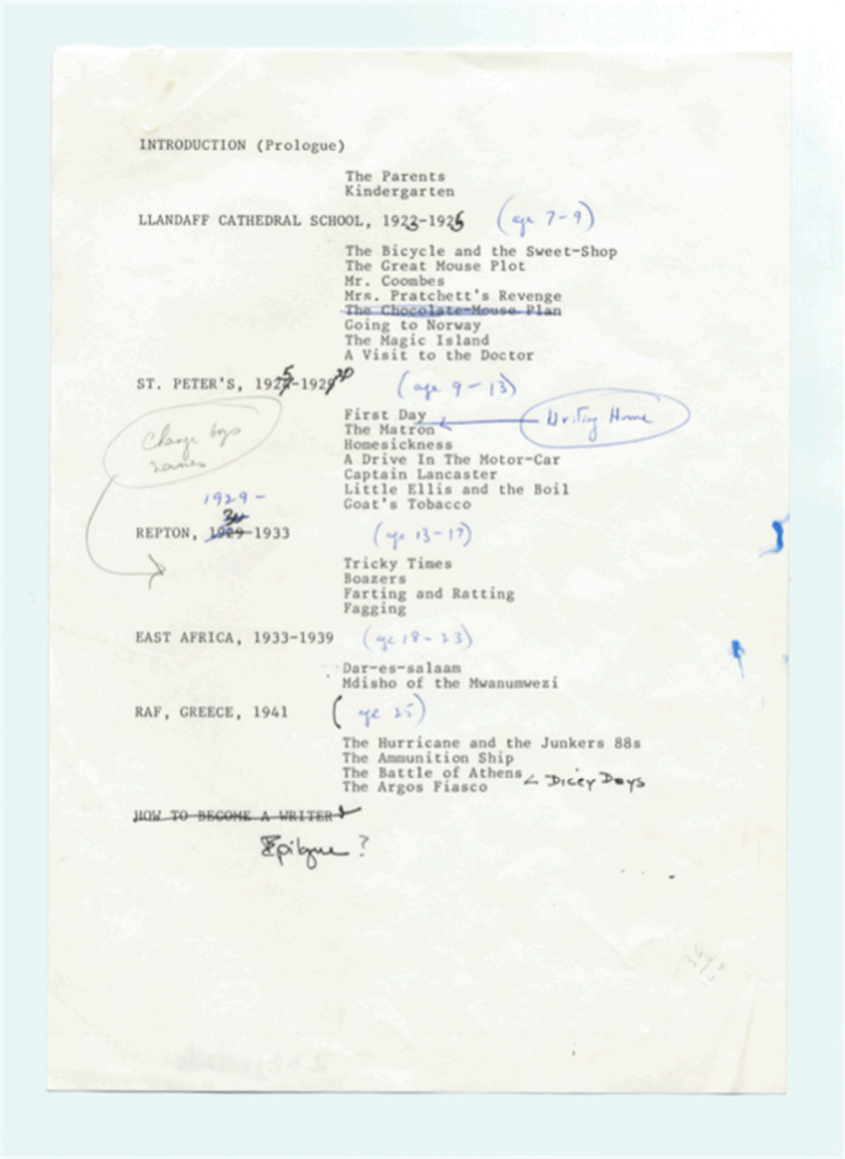


Figure 3. RD022302-5.

Figures 1 and 2 include references to Elmtree House 1920–1922, Llandaff Cathedral School 1922–1924, St Peters 1924–1929, Repton 1929–1933, East Africa 1933–1939, and Greece 1941. This draft of a preliminary table of contents featuring specific places and years is a good example of elements of semantic memory, or general knowledge such as names, dates, and locations (Schacter [2001] 2021, p. 37). These elements that form headings for potential chapters in Dahl's book are then imaginatively supplemented with forms of episodic memory, or recollections of personal experiences, involving vision, hearing, taste, smell, touch, the perception of pain, body awareness, sense of color, and sense of self (Schacter [2001] 2021, p. 37). To give some examples of this, below the "St Peters" heading, Dahl has added "Homesickness", below "Summer Holidays", he has made a note of "The Magic Island", and the header "Repton" features the note "Tricky Times", all elements pointing to episodic memory. Dahl adds linkages to specific episodes and contexts he experienced during his youth. When comparing the two manuscript pages (Figures 1 and 2) to the typescript draft of the table of contents (Figure 3), we can see on the typescript that Dahl has altered some of the years after the headings by means of black biro pen (he might have made a mistake in the exact dating in the manuscript draft), and that

he has added bracketed references to the age he was at that particular time, in blue biro pen (perhaps in an effort to remind himself of exactly how old he was at each stage).

Circling back to Dahl's comment about skimming past experiences off the top of his consciousness fifty to sixty years after these experiences took place and interpreting this comment in light of the drafts above, it becomes possible to understand how Dahl's more semantic memories of youth, i.e., locations and dates, were relatively solid in the first draft of *Boy*, but that the stories' contents and thus the episodic memories that these stories drew on, might have needed more bouts of imaginative writing before they were finalized. In "Aging and Cognition", Mara Mather (2010, p. 347) writes that whereas semantic memory shows relatively little decline during the aging process, episodic memory is affected by age-related deficiencies. Furthermore, Myriam C. Sander, Yana Fandakova, and Markus Werkle-Bergner have suggested that age-bound structural changes in the episodic memory system may "result in a reduced quality of older adults' memories" (Sander et al. 2021, p. 142). This could be the reason why Dahl engaged in more imaginative mindwork throughout many drafts to complete *Boy* and to publish the book when he was sixty-eight. The hundreds of pages of drafts and proofs for *Boy* held at Dahl's archive underscore this.

When considering the drafts of the table of contents for *Boy*, it becomes clear that while they certainly provide the backbone for the stories, they by no means compare to the richly evocative scenes of youth that Dahl depicts in his memoir of childhood. These drafts of the table of contents that Dahl worked on for *Boy* show reconstructive memory at work in terms of "imaginative compilation" (Sutton 2010, p. 30): Dahl is compiling a list of locations and dates and adding a few key ideas of which particular memories he will draw on in an imaginative way. As Marcelle Freiman (2015, p. 139) points out, imagination can generate writing, just as writing can reciprocally generate imagination. These drafts show Dahl negotiating such creative practices, merging memory and imagination on paper.

4.2. David Almond's Counting Stars: A "Memory Quilt"

The recognizable statement on the copyright page of David Almond's (2000) *Counting Stars* goes as follows: "All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental". In an interview with Vanessa Joosen, Almond (1951-) describes the stories in *Counting Stars* (2000) as "a way of dealing with experiences in my own childhood and not confronting them directly but using them as a kind of basis for fiction to reimagine them" (Almond 2020). Although some attention has been paid to archival research in relation to David Almond (Reynolds et al. 2019), his notes, sketches, manuscripts, typescripts, and proofs held at Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle (UK), form an archival treasure box. In *Counting Stars*, the author writes in the dedication that "like all stories, they merge memory and dream, the real and the imagined" (2000). Don Latham interprets this statement as making clear that while these stories are autobiographical in nature, "they are not simply transcriptions of events from his childhood and adolescence" (2006, p. 17). Latham explains that this thread in the development of identity is noticeable in all the author's works for young adults (2006, p. 7). Moreover, he describes the short stories in *Counting Stars* as featuring a striking sense of place, showing close family relations, evoking the repercussions of mourning loved ones, and revealing the importance of memories and storytelling for the development of children and adolescents (2006, p. 15).

The mindmap below (Figure 4), for example, features the note "Barbara", Almond's younger sister who passed away in 1959, when he was seven years old. Barbara features in many of the stories included in *Counting Stars* ("The Middle of the World", "The Angel of Chilside Road", "The Time Machine", "Barbara's Photographs", "Jonadab", "The Fusilier", "The Kitchen", and "Where Your Wings Were"). By tracing her name through the writing process in archive material dated "1982–2000" (Almond 1982–2000), from notes relating to *Counting Stars* (Figure 4) to a draft of the short story "Where Your Wings Were" (Figure 5),

we can see that Almond uses the name Barbara in his notes, but that he reimagined Barbara as "Helen" in a typescript:

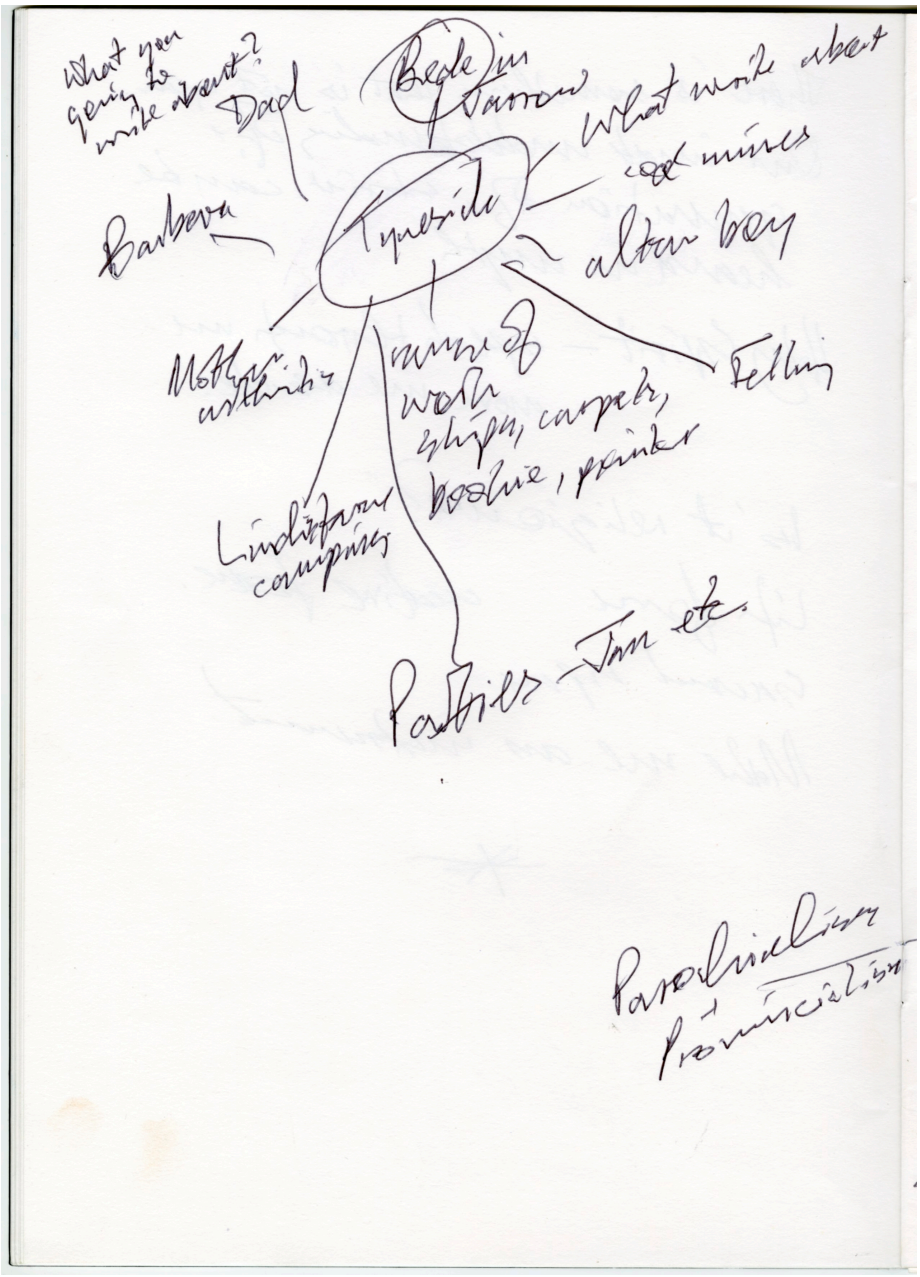
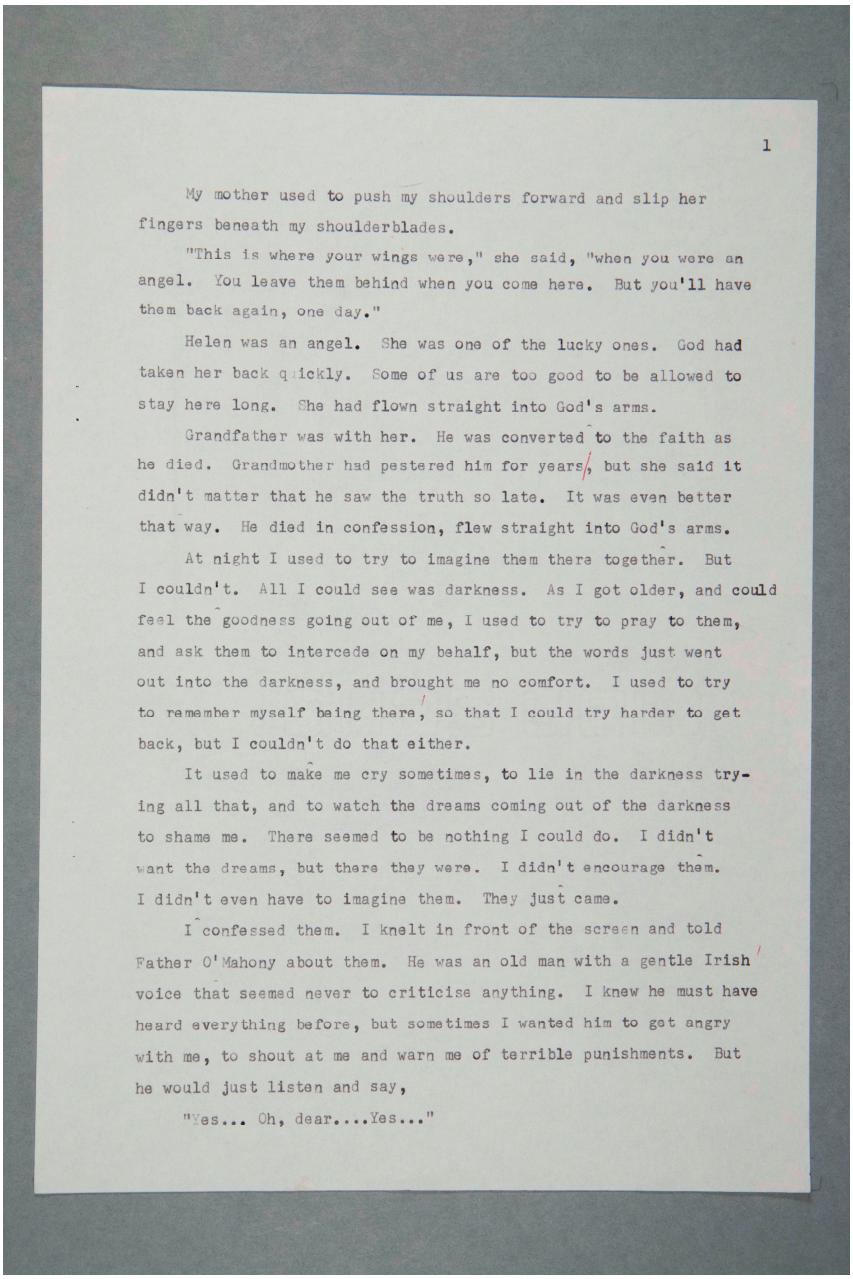


Figure 4. Note page from DA-34-03 "Notebooks".



1

My mother used to push my shoulders forward and slip her fingers beneath my shoulderblades.

"This is where your wings were," she said, "when you were an angel. You leave them behind when you come here. But you'll have them back again, one day."

Helen was an angel. She was one of the lucky ones. God had taken her back quickly. Some of us are too good to be allowed to stay here long. She had flown straight into God's arms.

Grandfather was with her. He was converted to the faith as he died. Grandmother had pestered him for years, but she said it didn't matter that he saw the truth so late. It was even better that way. He died in confession, flew straight into God's arms.

At night I used to try to imagine them there together. But I couldn't. All I could see was darkness. As I got older, and could feel the goodness going out of me, I used to try to pray to them, and ask them to intercede on my behalf, but the words just went out into the darkness, and brought me no comfort. I used to try to remember myself being there, so that I could try harder to get back, but I couldn't do that either.

It used to make me cry sometimes, to lie in the darkness trying all that, and to watch the dreams coming out of the darkness to shame me. There seemed to be nothing I could do. I didn't want the dreams, but there they were. I didn't encourage them. I didn't even have to imagine them. They just came.

I confessed them. I knelt in front of the screen and told Father O'Mahony about them. He was an old man with a gentle Irish voice that seemed never to criticise anything. I knew he must have heard everything before, but sometimes I wanted him to get angry with me, to shout at me and warn me of terrible punishments. But he would just listen and say,

"Yes... Oh, dear....Yes..."

Figure 5. DA-04-02-02-19.

Almond found it confronting to use the real name of his sister and changed her name as part of turning her into a character in a life-writing narrative. The author comments on this process in his afterword to *Counting Stars*:

> I was living on the dole in Suffolk when I wrote the first of the stories in Counting Stars. It was a bitterly cold winter. I wore a hat and scarf as I wrote at a table in a little room overlooking frosty farmland. The story seemed to come from nowhere. I remember writing the first words: "For a long time after Helen died, Mam used to pull my shoulders forward, kiss me, and slip her fingers beneath my shoulder blades and tell me, This is where your wings were. . ." My mother did do this when I was a boy. I could feel her fingers as I wrote. I could hear her voice. I knew the story was about my sister, Barbara, who died when I was a boy. But in that early version, I didn't dare to write her proper name. (2000, p. 199)

Schacter writes that "our memories of the past are often rescripted to fit with our present views and needs" ([2001] 2021, p. 199). If we link this to Almond's account of the writing process, it seems that he "rescripted" Barbara's name, changing it to Helen, in an effort to meet his needs at the time, namely, not wanting to be confronted with the name of his younger sibling, who had passed away.

In the same afterword, Almond explains how he went back to this story at a later stage in his career: "I came across the story I'd written in the cold Suffolk farmhouse. Again, it drew tears. But this time, I felt that something entirely new began to move and accumulate in my imagination and subconscious (. . .) I realised that I loved the story, that I'd managed to turn an agonising personal experience into an objective piece of art" (2000, p. 203). At this point, he describes transposing his grief into a work of art and creating a story he loved by reworking the painful experience in an imaginative way.

Another example stemming from *Counting Stars* relates to the distinction made in memory studies between the field perspective of memory and the observer perspective of memory. The field perspective approaches one's recalling of the past as "experiencing memories from the point of view from which we originally experience them", whereas the observer perspective considers moments when we recall the past "as a sort of witness or spectator, in other words, as an observer, of those happenings" (Hutto and Myin 2017, pp. 223–24). To give an example, imagine that you once danced on a table at a party. Should you recall that particular experience in the past, you could either recall it from a field perspective or an observer perspective. From a field perspective, you would relive that moment as if you were dancing with your body, standing on the table, feeling the beat of the music, and hearing the sounds around you. From an observer perspective, you would relive that moment as if you were watching yourself dance, as a spectator. The draft material below shows how Almond shifts from a field perspective to an observer perspective during the writing process. In the first paragraph of the annotated typescript (Figure 6), Almond has struck through "our" in "our garden" and "our apple tree" and has added an insertion of "the":

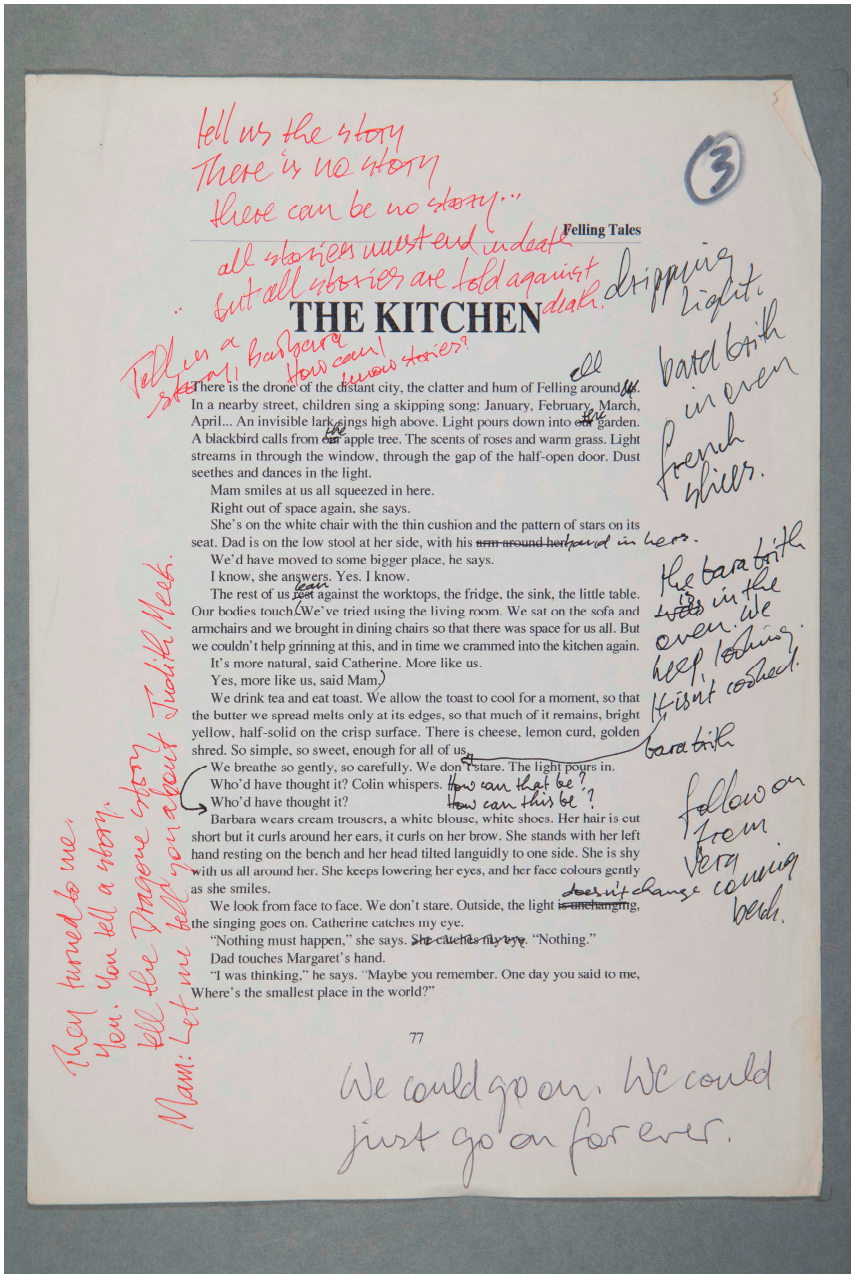


Figure 6. DA-04-02-02-06.

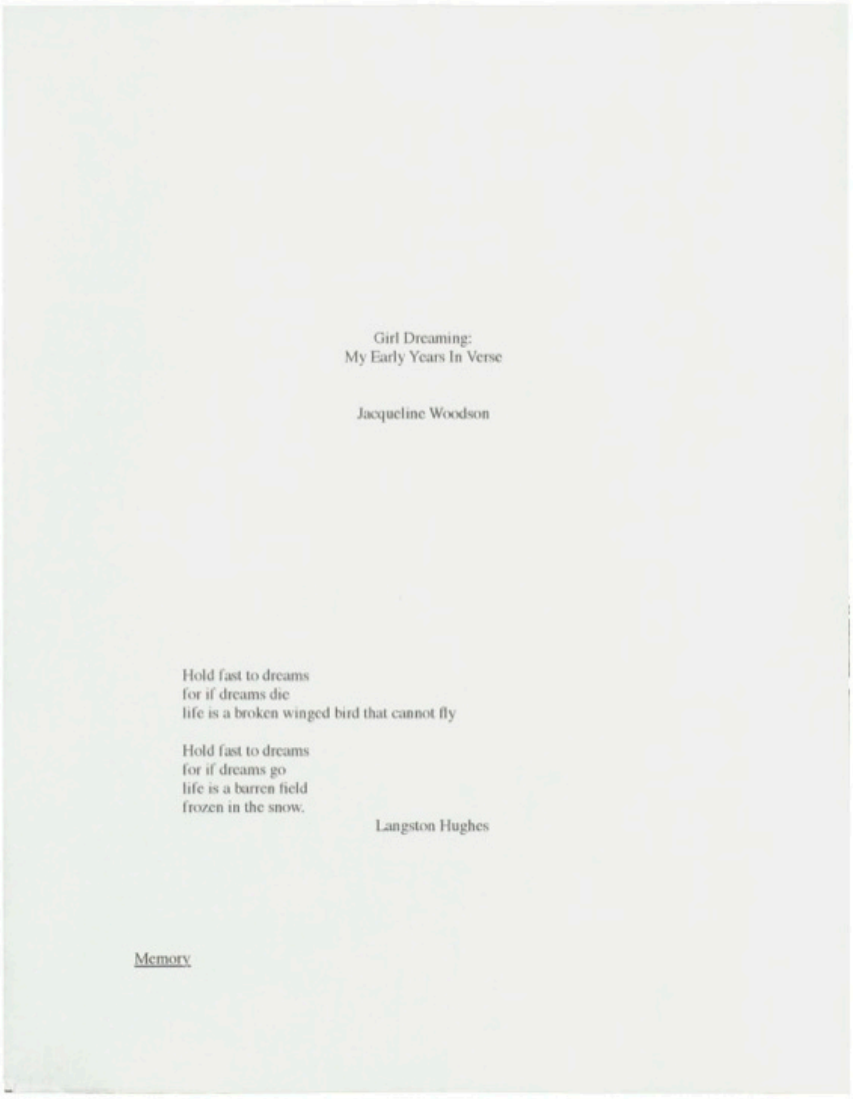
This may seem completely unimportant and random; however, this maneuver transforms a memory marked by the possessive form and considered from a field perspective (as in, the garden and the apple tree belonging to the Almond family) to a more distant, imaginative element in a story, viewed from an observer perspective. In a review of *Counting Stars*, William McLoughlin (2002, p. 225) describes the result of such creative writing as a "memory quilt". Indeed, the stories in *Counting Stars* can be considered as a patchwork quilt with overlapping squares of memory and imagination, or as described in the program of a performance Almond was involved with, namely *Kathryn Tickell, David Almond, Words and Music* (Tickell and Almond 2017, p. 24): the author creates a fictionalized North where real and imaginary elements "walk side by side".

4.3. Jacqueline Woodson: Memory as a "Mixed Bag"

Jacqueline Woodson (1963-) links her vocation to write about her youth in *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014) as stemming from her experiences of "growing up in a time when my

ordinary life wasn't represented" (in Chow 2019). The Beinecke Jacqueline Woodson Papers (Woodson 1980–2021) include hundreds of pages of material that document the author's writing process. In her author's note that accompanies *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Woodson explains that she is grateful for her memory, and she goes on to highlight the paper carriers that hold memories in the main narrative, referring to them as carriers that allow memories to be kept forever. The material presentation of *Brown Girl Dreaming* includes a combination of family trees, an author's note, a word of thanks, and family photographs. The book has a collage feel to it, and the pages of the 2016 edition have chapbook-like, roughly torn edges. The building blocks of Woodson's archive, which includes notebooks, journals, and photographs, seem to have filtered into the published form of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, lending the book its formal qualities, perhaps inspiring the artistic choice of a collage technique, the inclusion of photographs, and the journal-like layout. The material carriers that document Woodson's writing process in her archive are transposed to both the content and form of her life writing in *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

Take, for example, the first two pages of the first typescript (Figures 7 and 8) of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, dating from 2013–2014, which was then entitled *Girl Dreaming: My Early Years in Verse*. The opening section of the narrative was first entitled "Memory" (Figure 7), to then be altered in the third version of the typescript to "Other People's Memory", and shifted to a later part of the opening chapter (Figure 9):


Girl Dreaming:
My Early Years In Verse

Jacqueline Woodson

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams die
life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams go
life is a barren field
frozen in the snow.

Langston Hughes

Memory

Figure 7. JWJ MSS 245 Box 12 f. BGD 1-1.

You were born in the morning, my grandmother said.
I remember the sound of the birds. Mean
old blue jays squawking. They like to fight, you know.
Don't mess with blue jays!
I hear they can kill a cat they get mad enough

And then the phone was ringing. And through all that static and squawking, I heard
your mama telling me you'd come.
Another girl, I stood there thinking. Less than two years
after the first one.
Just like your mama and Caroline. Not even a whole
year between them.
And that's how I know. That's how I remember.
The way I figure it, most of Greenville knew
before I even hung up my phone. It was the old days
and you could do that. Pick up the phone and hear
somebody else's life story.

You came in the late afternoon, my mother said.
Two days after I turned twenty-two. Jack was at work.
Took a rush hour bus
trying
to get to you. But
by the time he arrived,
you were already here. He wasn't there, my mother said
but what else is new.

It must have been near night, my father, Jack, says now.
When I saw you, I said She the one look the most like me.
Guess you're the unlucky one in the family.

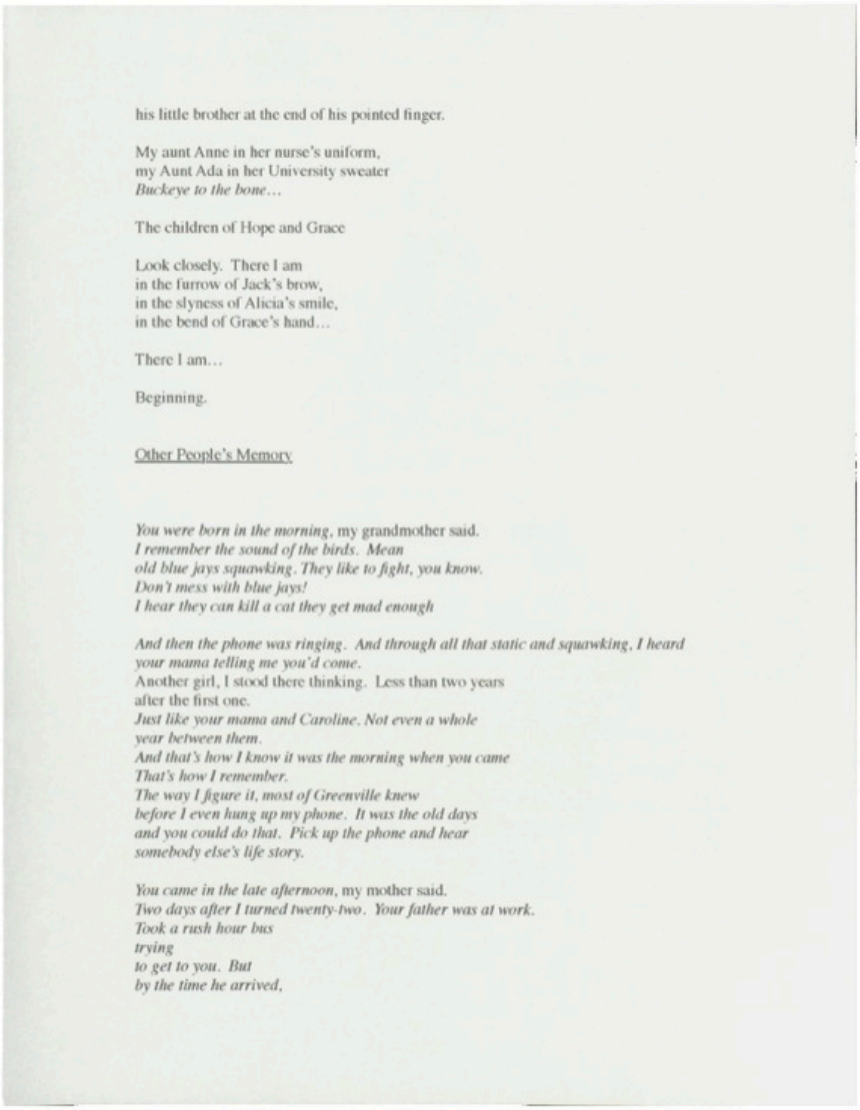
He laughs.

Was it you or your sister that come first, he wants to know.
When your memory goes, you don't have much of nothing left, do you?
Hold on to your memory, Jackie, my father says.
You might need it one day.

Hope Is Born

First born grandson to

Figure 8. JWJ MSS 245 Box 12 f. BGD 1-2.



his little brother at the end of his pointed finger.

My aunt Anne in her nurse's uniform,
my Aunt Ada in her University sweater
Buckeye to the bone…

The children of Hope and Grace

Look closely. There I am
in the furrow of Jack's brow,
in the slyness of Alicia's smile,
in the bend of Grace's hand…

There I am…

Beginning.

Other People's Memory

You were born in the morning, my grandmother said.
I remember the sound of the birds. Mean
old blue jays squawking. They like to fight, you know.
Don't mess with blue jays!
I hear they can kill a cat they get mad enough

And then the phone was ringing. And through all that static and squawking, I heard
your mama telling me you'd come.
Another girl, I stood there thinking. Less than two years
after the first one.
Just like your mama and Caroline. Not even a whole
year between them.
And that's how I know it was the morning when you came
That's how I remember.
The way I figure it, most of Greenville knew
before I even hung up my phone. It was the old days
and you could do that. Pick up the phone and hear
somebody else's life story.

You came in the late afternoon, my mother said.
Two days after I turned twenty-two. Your father was at work.
Took a rush hour bus
trying
to get to you. But
by the time he arrived,

Figure 9. JWJ MSS 245 Box 12 f. BGD 5-6.

By tracing such subtle maneuvers on the typescripts as they evolve through time, it becomes feasible to see how Woodson alters pivotal elements of the story. Particularly interesting is how she transitions between "personal narrative" and "family story" (van Lierop-Debrauwer 2021b, p. 116): by altering "Memory" to "Other People's Memory", Woodson imaginatively highlights that the shared details regarding her birth, as in "*You were born in the morning*, my grandmother said" (italics in original), are positioned in a perspective that credits her family members and their input in what she remembers from her childhood. After all, "memory", as Daniel D. Hutto and Erik Myin note, "is a mixed bag" (2017, p. 203), and we often rely on other people's recollections along with photographs to revisit our own pasts. In response to the question "How do you feel about people writing outside of their own experiences?", Woodson stresses the importance of family, explaining that "my hope is that those who write about the tears and the laughter and the language in my grandmother's house have first sat down at the table with us and dipped the bread of their own experiences into our stew" (Woodson 1998, n. pag.).

5. Conclusions: Reconstructing Childhood via Reimagined Memories

In "Charles Chesnutt, Rhetorical Passing, and the Flesh-and-Blood Author: A Case for Considering Authorial Intention", Faye Halpern proposes that "we should seize the opportunity to know the IA [implied author] not just from the direction of the text but from

the direction of the flesh-and-blood author" (2022, p. 56). This article on reconstructing childhood via reimagined memories has delved into some directions taken in the writing material of Roald Dahl, David Almond, and Jacqueline Woodson, exploring ways in which we might get to know these "flesh-and-blood authors" (Halpern 2022, p. 56) and their navigations of memories and imagination, namely by tracing creative developments during their writing processes via the materials held at their archives.

Of course, the few examples discussed above are merely a first foray into the available material, or the tip of the archival iceberg, so to speak, and it will take much more time to comb through all the material for each author. However, these brief examples do show negotiations of memory and imagination, highlighting the blurriness of fiction and nonfiction in such forms of life writing in children's literature. Quentin Blake wrote that Dahl created "hybrids of true autobiography, recollections and his own imagination" (qtd. in Scott 2012, p. 172). Erica Wagner, writing in *The Times*, described Almond's *Counting Stars* as "a moving, perceptive collection that drifts back and forth over the shadowy border between fiction and autobiography" (Wagner 2000). And in an interview with Michelle Dean, Woodson explains that she "just started writing down memories", yet "she gradually came to realise there were holes in hers" (Woodson 2014b, n. pag.). These holes can be imaginatively filled when engaging in life writing, especially given the reconstructive nature of memory and its vantage point that remembering is imagining the past.

While authors might inevitably write from a repertoire of their past experiences, it is perhaps not desirable to categorically unpick memory and imagination, or real and imagined experiences. It is the porousness of such writings that forms the basis of the field of life writing. As Zachary Leader points out, "the blurring of distinctions may help to account for life-writing's growing acceptance as a field of academic study, reflecting a wider distrust of fixed forms, simple or single truths or meanings, narrative transparency, objectivity, 'literature' as opposed to writing" (2015, pp. 1–2). Examinations of the dynamics of authors' writing processes can only help build a bigger and better picture of how these flesh-and-blood authors imaginatively drew on childhood memories to write stories for young readers. Dahl, Almond, and Woodson wrote about their recollections of youth across the life span, revisiting experiences that took place decades earlier. In that sense, this article has discussed possible understandings of the narrative genesis of the authors' works while drawing on the manifestations of their literary creativity in an attempt to broaden knowledge regarding memory and imagination. Authors' and their heirs' increased awareness of the importance of keeping and donating their archives to research institutions means that the outcomes of this kind of research may be relevant for future studies on life writing, including modernist reimaginings based on childhood memories by Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Dylan Thomas, for example, with archive material at Smith College Library in Massachusetts, Yale Library, and the National Library of Wales, respectively.

Shifting back to Rothman's essay in *The New Yorker*, which I mentioned in the introduction, he writes that "there's a recursive quality to acts of self-narration. I tell myself a story about myself in order to synchronize myself with the tale I'm telling; then, inevitably, I revise the story as I change (. . .) We change, and change our view of that change, for as long as we live" (2022, n. pag.). It is unlikely that Dahl, Almond, or Woodson will change the tales they told of their childhood as published in *Boy*, *Counting Stars*, and *Brown Girl Dreaming*, but as long as their archive material is open for research, we can continue to change our view of the changes they made to their reimagined memories.

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