



Continuity-in-Change in David Almond's *The Savage*: Narrative Self-Shaping in Moments of Metanarrative

Emma-Louise Silva¹
University of Antwerp

Abstract

David Almond's *The Savage* (2008), illustrated by Dave McKean, demonstrates how narrating enables the adolescent protagonist, Blue Baker, to explore themes of loss, grief and bullying in the embedded graphic narrative he creates about a savage boy, a story Blue calls 'The Savage'. The primary narrative focuses on the interplay between Blue's behaviour and his thoughts and feelings. Interspersed throughout this self-narrative are Blue's metanarrative comments regarding his story-creating process. These metanarrative comments not only reveal Blue's reflections regarding his role as narrator of 'The Savage', they are vital for understanding his experience of continuity-in-change. The metanarrative utterances in *The Savage* – which is ultimately a book about storytelling and illustrating – show Blue engaging in reflective and transformative 'narrative self-shaping' (Hutto 2016). Based on narrative medicine, cognitive narratology, age studies and children's literature studies, this essay underscores that analyses of age-related metanarrative comments can reveal illuminating facets of characters' coming of age, especially when they engage in creative acts of shaping the self via narratives. Ultimately, this essay shows how narrating tales and sharing stories can be empowering, and this across the lifespan.

Keywords: narrative self-shaping, continuity-in-change, metanarrative, David Almond

Samenvatting

In *The Savage* van David Almond en Dave McKean (2008), creëert het adolescenten hoofdpersonage, Blue Baker, een grafische vertelling, die is ingebed in de roman. Blue's verhaal, met als hoofdpersonage 'the savage', ondersteunt hem in het reflecteren over verlies, verdriet, en pestgedrag. Het primaire narratief focust op de wisselwerking tussen Blue's gedrag, zijn gedachten, en zijn gevoelens. Door zijn 'self-narrative' heen staat Blue in metanarratieve reflecties stil bij het schrijfproces. Die metanarratieve opmerkingen tonen niet alleen hoe Blue zich voelt als verteller van het verhaal 'The Savage', ze zijn ook essentieel om te begrijpen hoe hij 'continuïteit-in-verandering' ervaart. *The Savage* – een boek dat schrijven en illustreren centraal stelt – toont hoe Blue in de weer is met reflectieve en transformatieve 'narrative self-shaping' (Hutto 2016). Op basis van narrative medicine, cognitieve narratologie, leeftijdsstudies en studies in jeugdliteratuur toont dit artikel aan hoe analyses van leeftijdsgebonden metanarratieve reflecties inzichten kunnen geven wat betreft 'coming of age', zeker wanneer personages zichzelf op creatieve manieren vormgeven via verhalen. Zo laat het artikel zien hoe het vertellen en het delen van verhalen 'empowerment' kan genereren, en dat een leven lang.

Trefwoorden: 'narrative self-shaping', continuïteit-in-verandering, metanarratieve reflecties, David Almond

Continuity-in-Change via Self-Narrative, Metanarrative, and Graphic Narrative

Blue Baker, the adolescent protagonist in David Almond's *The Savage* (illustrated by Dave McKean), throws aside his school counsellor's advice to write his 'thoughts and feelings down' to grieve his father's sudden death (2008, 7). Instead, Blue 'rip[s] up all that stuff' about himself, and starts writing 'The Savage', a story about a savage boy (Almond 2008, 7). Themes of loss, grief and bullying are depicted by means of Blue's self-narrative, which focuses on the interplay between Blue's behaviour and his thoughts and feelings, allowing a version of his 'identity or self to emerge' (Caracciolo 2014, 139). Specked throughout Blue's self-narrative are his metanarrative utterances regarding the process of narrating his story, or what Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning describe as 'the narrator's reflections on the act or process of narration' (2014, 344). Reflecting on the story he narrates, Blue discloses, for example, that 'it maybe looked like a mess, but it was a mess that made sense, that made a story on the page

and in [his] mind that was as vivid and real as the real world' (Almond 2008, 67). Blue's metanarrative utterances provide commentary in relation to the storytelling process he goes through when writing and illustrating his tale about the savage.

The Savage demonstrates how narrating enables Blue to take what Michael Bamberg describes as 'a reflective position vis-à-vis self' (2014, 241) and to explore what age scholar Susan Pickard calls a 'narrative identity' (2016, 101). The metanarrative comments Blue makes are significant in these reflections regarding his selfhood. He seems to become infused with some of the savage's character traits as he explores the boy's narrative identity in the story he writes. Blue reflects on this process of osmosis by means of the metanarrative comments he makes, for instance: '[w]hen I drew him and wrote about him, I could see him, I could hear him, I could smell him. Sometimes, it was nearly like I was him and he was me' (Almond 2008, 31). This dynamic situation sees Blue channelling a more 'savage' version of himself, absorbing some of the character traits he has installed in the protagonist of his story.

Although metanarrative comments are often discussed under the umbrella of metafiction, such comments are actually 'a distinct form of narratorial utterance' according to Neumann and Nünning (2014, 348). In the *Handbook of Narratology*, the following categories of metanarrative are mentioned: 'formal', 'structural', 'content-related', and 'reception-oriented types of metanarrative' (2014, 348). In her response to Nünning's seminal essay dating from 2001,² Monika Fludernik defines the kind of metanarrative at work in novels such as the *The Savage* as 'proprio-metanarration' (2003, 24-25). Blue's comments are auto-referential; he reflects on his own acts of narrating.³ In a similar vein, Neumann and Nünning explain that metanarrative comments 'are concerned with the act and/or process of narration, and not with its fictional nature' (2014, 344-345). Transferring this to *The Savage*, Blue's metanarrative observations regarding the story he creates in his notebook reveal that he is reflecting intensely on the process of narrating his story about the savage, all while showing what effects such acts of narrating have on him.

Before proceeding with an analysis of how Blue's metanarrative comments give readers insights into his development, it is important to disentangle what the terms 'metalepsis' and 'mise en abyme' mean here too. In his discussion of metalepsis, John Pier points to Gérard Genette and his mentioning of a 'shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world *in which* one tells', and 'the world *of which* one tells' (Pier 2014, 326 (my italics E-L. S.); Genette [1972] 1980, 236). Janice Bland discusses such boundaries in *The Savage* between the world *in which* Blue tells and the world *of which* he tells by unpicking the narrative metalepsis at work: 'the embedded story is created by the young narrator Blue and his Savage acts out what Blue desires but is

afraid to do', however, 'gradually', as Bland rightly notes, 'story levels begin to intertwine and interact' (2014, 6). *Mise en abyme*, then, is defined by Neumann and Nünning as being 'founded on a relation of similarity between the embedded and embedding stories, rather than on transgression' (2014, 339). However, for the focal point of this essay, namely the effect that narrating has on Blue's evolving selfhood, the metanarrative comments are key, and thus not the concepts of metafiction, metalepsis and *mise en abyme*. The metanarrative comments are of essence when discussing the effect that narrating the story about 'the savage' has on Blue's self-perception. This profound effect is made possible thanks to Blue's engagement with his notebook, and thanks to his handwritten story and his illustrations of 'the savage'.

Almond's choice to depict Blue's experiences through his notebook rather echoes the author's own writing process. Almond often stresses the importance of writing materials in interviews, mentioning his use of 'notebooks, sketchbooks, pens, pencils, and coloured pencils' that allow 'words and images to flow from [his] hand onto the page' (2018). Furthermore, Almond explains that his 'process of exploration' consists of filling notebooks with words and images, thereby using large sketchpads to do so because they give him the ability to 'spread [his] writing across the empty spaces, so the notebook almost becomes like a landscape that [he] can explore and inhabit' (2021). This image of exploring and inhabiting notebooks as if they were landscapes holds for Blue's engagement with his notebook in *The Savage* too. In the metanarrative comments that are dispersed throughout the primary narrative, Blue often mentions that he almost feels as if he *is* the savage when he writes about him and draws him, describing the creative process as 'like [he] was living right inside the savage's story, like the savage was living right inside [him]' (Almond 2008, 67).

Quite similar to Almond's acts of notebook-filling, Blue's story takes the form of a graphic narrative, or a narrative 'told in words and images' (Gardner & Herman 2011, 3) in which 'the mark of handwriting is an important part of the rich extra-semantic information' (Chute & DeKoven 2006, 767). Almond's choice to convey Blue's thoughts via an embedded story demands further consideration of its formal qualities. McKean's graphic approach to *The Savage* involves a consistent font that represents Blue's handwriting in his notebook, along with playful typography, creative page layout, and inset texts and illustrations. *The Savage* is most certainly what Eve Tandoi calls 'a hybrid novel' (2017). Tandoi discusses the specific position of such novels: 'By inviting readers to consider alternative ways of making meaning, hybrid novels systematically draw attention to themselves as artefacts in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (2017, 330). Lissi Athanasiou-Krikelis elucidates such complexities. According to her typology, *The Savage* fits into

two categories: it is a 'book about telling or illustrating stories', in which 'the dominant is art-making and / or storytelling' (2020, 363), and it also features a 'book-within-a-book' (2020, 365). Blue's art-making and storytelling acts, which he describes in the primary narrative by means of self-narrative passages interspersed with metanarrative comments, *take form* in the 'book-within-a-book' he produces (Krikelis 2020, 365). Furthermore, Blue's acts of narrating the story he creates about 'the savage' provide him with moments of alleviation: he can embody the savage's experiences, and 'explore the landscapes' in his notebook (Almond 2018), momentarily escaping his own experiences of grieving his father and of being bullied.

Now that the groundwork has been laid out as to how self-narrative, metanarrative and graphic narrative function in Almond's *The Savage*, it is interesting to consider how the process of continuity-in-change features in these different forms of narrative, and to assess the impact this process has on Blue's evolving selfhood. In order to question such complexities in *The Savage*, this essay will consider 'narrative self-shaping' (Hutto 2016) through the prism of narrative medicine, cognitive narratology, age studies and children's literature studies. By approaching narrative self-shaping this way, the concept of continuity-in-change as discussed in age studies (Pickard 2016, 102-108) can be considered from a new perspective, especially regarding the ways it manifests itself in children's literature. As Vanessa Joosen has pointed out, the fields of children's literature studies and age studies 'both start from the same constructivist approach to age and have many insights to offer to each other' (2015, 127). This interdisciplinary approach can be extrapolated by considering the way in which Blue evolves in Almond's *The Savage*, revealing age-related forms of character development during Blue's creative process of storytelling.

By commenting on his acts of narrating the story about the savage, readers gain access to Blue's experience of continuity-in-change, which is seen as an 'essential feature of identity throughout the life course' (Pickard 2016, 102). Blue displays continuity, in that '[t]races and vestiges of [his] former self are retained' (Pickard 2016, 104), and yet he also displays change, in that his metanarrative comments reveal 'the before and after, of a self' (Bynum 2001, 181). These discussions of continuity-in-change harken back to Heraclitus's motto of change being the only constant: everything 'is in process of coming-to-be' and 'is undergoing some secret alteration in one way or another at every moment' (Wheelwright 1959, 30). Bamberg stresses that when considering the unfolding of identity in time, the 'narrating subject' must be understood as 'neither locked into stability nor drifting through constant change, but rather as something that is multiple, contradictory, and distributed over time and place' (2014, 242). This perspective aligns with Pickard's view of narrative identity and

continuity-in-change as 'a more fruitful approach to thinking about the relationship of self and time' (2016, 243).

By questioning how self-narratives can form the basis of 'self-disclosure, self-reflection and self-criticism, potentially leading to self-control, self-constraint, and self-discipline' (2014, 244), Bamberg concludes that narrating is 'a privileged genre for identity construction' (2014, 241), as do Joanna Haynes and Karin Murrin in *Picturebooks, Pedagogy and Philosophy*: 'Stories become part of us. We *are* our stories, and it is in this sense that we create ourselves and the world we live in through stories. In listening to stories and in "reading" narratives we actively construct meaning, and in doing so we construct ourselves' (2012, 127). The metanarrative utterances in *The Savage* not only reveal Blue's continuity-in-change, they also suggest that his 'story-driven experience' (Caracciolo 2014, 57) helps him to find a way to heal following his father's death. Blue's acts of writing and illustrating his story about the savage serve as 'medicine', albeit in narrative and graphic forms.

Narrative as Medicine: Shaping the Self while Shaping Stories

The transformative power of narrating is held in high regard in the field of narrative medicine. As Rishi Goyal explains in 'Narration and Medicine', 'the very act of writing or telling a story can be healing in certain cases' (2014, 407). During her presentation at the *International Conference on Narrative*, Rita Charon, the founder of narrative medicine in the United States, described the movement that started gaining ground in the nineties as 'practices that make visible or audible, the hidden, opaque, obscured aspects of health and sickness, including fears and hopes', explaining that 'we need to represent what we perceive so that we can perceive it' (2021). The benefits in healthcare are explored in *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine*: clinicians, scholars and creative writers have joined forces at Columbia University to 'challenge a reductionist, fragmented medicine that holds little regard for the singular aspects of a patient's life', instead broadening the focus to include personal and social aspects of patients' lives and gauging such vital elements by means of narrative strategies to 'widen the clinical gaze' (2017, 1). Charon et al. point out how narrative medicine emerged as a discipline in order to 'fortify healthcare with the capacity to skilfully receive the accounts persons give of themselves – to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved to action by the stories of others' (2017, 1). Not only do practices of narrative medicine help healthcare professionals to better understand and value accounts told or written by patients, they also prompt narrative competence and highlight the importance of engaging in self-reflection in creative ways.

Charon illustrates how using creative means, such as writing stories in notebooks, can aid people in being able to 'midwife their own process of seeing what they know, through what they've created' (2021). Reflective writing and literary analysis are pillars of this approach that believes in the 'discovery potential of creative acts' (Charon et al. 2017, 2). By writing creative pieces, people who engage in practices of narrative medicine are moved to transformative reflection, just as Blue is moved to heal by narrating the story he writes about the savage during the period of mourning his father.⁴ Being 'moved to action' (Charon et al. 2017, 1) by stories is a focal theme in *The Savage*: once Blue has finished creating his story, he decides to share it with his family, explaining that 'it's time to move forward' (Almond 2008, 79).

In 'Narrative Practices in Medicine and Therapy: Philosophical Reflections', Daniel D. Hutto et al. reflect on 'narrative medicine', or what they define as a movement that aims to strengthen the 'narrative capacities of those charged with the care of others', and they also comment on 'narrative therapy' and its ambition to 'improve the life skills of patients by enabling them to tell richer life stories' (2017, 302-303). Hutto et al. aim to provide 'philosophical support' to these two movements that revolve around narrative: they believe that narrative medicine's strategy to improve empathy by 'improving narrative competence' does not hold, and suggest that the focal point should be on narrative competence and not on empathy '*per se*' (2017, 301; 304). By raising questions regarding where exactly narrative competence lies – be it in theoretical frameworks that reflect on how stories work, or 'extended exposure to and practice with stories' (2017, 307) – they conclude that narrative medicine and narrative therapy are valuable paths to take in the exploration of selfhood and the promotion of 'human flourishing' (2017, 314).

Regarding selfhood, Hutto et al. point out that we should be wary when discussing 'what selves are and how they are constituted', seeing as we are not 'wholly constituted by narrativizing activity' (2017, 313-314). In his seminal *Consciousness Explained*, Daniel C. Dennett discusses selfhood and narrative in terms that consider language as the most prominent bearer of self-narrative (1991, 412-430). Dennett notes that 'we are almost constantly engaged in presenting ourselves to others, and to ourselves' (1991, 417-418). However, as cognitive narratologist Marco Caracciolo explains: 'Arguing that I *am* constituted by stories is overstating the case; arguing that the stories that I – and other people – tell about myself have a bearing on my public identity seems to be much more readily acceptable' (2014, 138). Drawing on enactivism, one of the four 'Es' included under the umbrella term of '4E cognition' (Newen, de Bruin & Gallagher 2018), Caracciolo stresses that such an approach can 'help us make the problem of the narrativity of the self more tractable by reminding

us that what we call a self (the center or subject of one's experience) emerges from embodied and intersubjective interactions – and that narrative, as a socio-cultural practice, is an important factor in the latter kind of interactions' (2014, 135). Like Charon, enactivists Hutto and Erik Myin make a link to writing stories as being therapeutic: 'Engaging in narrative practices, those that involve giving accounts in rich storied content', they argue, 'has been shown to correlate positively with mental health' (2017, 229).

The strands of 4E cognition – or the embodied, embedded (Varela, Thompson & Rosch [1991] 2016), extended (Clark & Chalmers 1998) and enactive strands (Hutto & Myin 2013, 2017) as discussed in philosophy of mind – share an externalist understanding of the mind, holding that our selfhood emerges via our interactions with our physical, social and cultural environment. To give an example, Blue's engagement with his notebooks and his acts of storytelling, both in written and graphic forms, 'criss-cross the boundaries of skin and skull' as Lambros Malafouris puts it in his discussion of creative material engagement (2014, 147). These approaches that set the fusion of mind-body-world centre stage all argue that the mind cannot be uncoupled from body and world. Marc Slors et al. elucidate the inextricability of these experiential linkages when it comes to narratives:

We make sense of individual experiences by placing them in their narrative context. Experiences are never 'just' experiences, they are always coloured and shaped by the biography of the person whose experience it is. Think, for instance, of the experience of entering a plane that is ready for take-off. One such experience is had by a routine businessman who flies at least twice a week, and one by someone who struggles to overcome his fear of flying for the first time in ten years. These are quite different experiences, and what makes them different is the narratives in which they fit. (2015, 206)

The Savage forms a good illustration of putting experiences into narrative contexts seeing as it depicts 'the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs' (Varela, Thompson & Rosch [1991] 2016, 9). Such forms of creativity 'play a central role in making it possible to evaluate our reasons for acting by reflecting upon our impulses, dispositions and attitudes', according to Hutto (2016, 25). Hutto et al. suggest that the ways in which we engage in narrative practice can exert an influence on the affordances we perceive, and that 'reauthoring our lives – seeing things through a new narrative frame – can re-direct our attention and open our eyes to possibilities for action that were not

salient to us before' (2017, 314), as is the case in Almond's *The Savage*. In this light, Hutto highlights self-shapers' abilities to have 'special self-reflective and self-regulating motivations and capacities' (2016, 24). It is this kind of self-shaping that can aid in reflective transformation when it comes to acts of storytelling. The story Blue creates about the savage in his notebook has repercussions on his selfhood, because it allows him to explore the savage's narrative identity during the creative process of ascribing character traits to the savage boy.

Shape-Shifting through Storytelling

Almond is an author whose oeuvre features many creative child characters who write and illustrate stories. As Perry Nodelman points out, a typical 'Almond protagonist' will often be depicted as having 'a talent for some form of artistry, especially writing' (2014, 32). Almond has repeatedly highlighted the importance of creative writing in interviews: he holds a high regard of storytelling as a therapeutic process that can prompt reflective transformation and, ultimately, generate works of art (2010; 2011; 2017; 2018; 2020). This vantage point on writing is shared by Louise DeSalvo in *Writing as a Way of Healing*, as she contemplates on the fact that 'through writing, suffering can be transmuted into art' (1999, 41). Almond's child characters, such as Mina McKee in *My Name is Mina* (2010), Davie in *Clay* (2005) and the (same-named) protagonist Davie in *The Colour of the Sun* (2018), are often portrayed writing and illustrating in notebooks in order to deal with stressful experiences, entrusting their thoughts and feelings to journals, all while exploring their identities and creating stories as they go.

Almond reflected on such acts of storytelling when discussing the writing process of his semi-autobiographical story collection *Counting Stars* with Joosen (2020). His childhood experiences served as the basis for those stories, which he says gave him the opportunity to re-imagine his experiences. As he puts it: 'the narrator was a kind of me, writing about myself, as if I wasn't myself' (Almond in Joosen 2020). Almond's remark about narrating also resembles Blue's metanarrative comment that 'it was nearly like I was him and he was me', when he reflects on his depiction of the savage boy (Almond 2008, 31). Blue decentres himself by introducing 'the savage' in the embedded story, and is able to reflect on his character's identity while indirectly considering his own identity too. Bamberg points out that such acts of narrating enable 'speakers/writers to disassociate the speaking/writing self from the act of speaking [or writing]' (2014, 241).

By means of their ideas on 'trans-autobiographical narrative', Gian Luca Barbieri et al. suggest that this technique 'starts from some fragments of the author's

autobiography and employs them to create a fictional story' (2016, 420). Barbieri et al. explain that such processes can allow writers to reflect on life events from another perspective, thereby creating stories while retaining a certain distance from their experiences (2016, 420). Their study, which involved asking forty-eight children admitted to hospital to invent stories, showed that the young patients' acts of imaginative storytelling were able to 'effectively transpose the children's emotions and their experiences onto a fictional field', the children thereby experiencing 'a temporary escape from reality' (2016, 425). By temporarily engaging in narrative practice, the children were able to consider identities other than their own.

The fact that Blue is an author-illustrator-creator is a case in point of Bamberg's comment that 'designing characters in fictitious timespace has the potential of opening up territory for exploring identity, reaching beyond traditional boundaries, and testing out novel identities' (2014, 242). Blue – as the 'designer' of 'the savage' both in the verbal and pictorial sense – is imbued with the power to test out a 'novel identity' in the guise of the character he creates (Bamberg 2014, 242). Blue can explore the savage's identity by drawing the savage, by depicting the savage as a wild boy living 'under the ruined chapel in Burgess Woods' (Almond 2008, 7), and by describing the savage's first encounter with the bully Hopper (Almond 2008, 19), for example. Blue explains that he 'wanted blood and guts and adventures, so that's what [he] wrote', going on to reveal that he didn't share his story with anyone, 'it was [his] kind of story, just for [himself]' (Almond 2008, 12).

Blue's creative process ultimately helps him to come to terms with his father's death and provides him with an inspirational character to whom he can relate. In *The Courage to Imagine: The Child Hero in Children's Literature*, Roni Natov highlights the importance of engaging in creative processes during difficult periods: '[a]s healing may take time, creating a story, drawing, or other art form suggests ways of acknowledging and containing it' (2018, 60). The topics of storytelling, life, death, coming of age, and healing after the loss of a parent that are central to *The Savage* are conveyed in innovative ways by Blue. The protagonist's notebook is a place of solace, a place to experiment with emotions, with words and with stories. It also acts as a medium he can confide in. Blue writes to cope, because, after his father's death, he restrains from confiding in his mother to spare her: 'I couldn't bother Mam about it, not with what she was going through, so for the first time, there was nobody at home that I could tell' (Almond 2008, 18). Blue does tell the school counsellor, Mrs Molloy, about the bully, Hopper, and her reaction provides Blue with the same advice she gave him when his father passed away, namely to 'write it down' (Almond 2008, 18).

Although Blue struggles with writing at first, the creation of his story about 'the savage' does help in shifting his attention away from the grieving process, even if just for a while. Blue tells the story of an illiterate savage boy living in a cave under a chapel in the woods nearby. This boy has no family, and no friends, and he survives on berries, roots, rabbits, chickens, and any leftovers he can find in bins. He owns an array of kitchen knives and an axe, which he uses in order to protect himself. Any passers-by are caught, murdered and eaten, their bones thrown down an ancient pit shaft. Blue describes the savage as 'truly wild' (Almond 2008, 11), 'crewel and vishus and hard as b***** nails' (Almond 2008, 51), remarking that he knows that 'the spelling isn't brilliant', but that he 'was younger' when he wrote this part of the story (Almond 2008, 7).⁵ One day, the savage sees Hopper in the forest. Blue narrates that Hopper was 'horribil' and that he 'made life horibel for nice kids, specially if they were weak or sad' (Almond 2008, 25). He also mentions that the savage 'could tell strate away that the kid was no good and he hated him strate away' (Almond 2008, 25).

Blue 'felt much better' after narrating part of the savage's story because '[i]t was great to see Hopper through the savage's eyes, and to write how ugly and stupid and horrible he was. It was great to think that if there really was a savage in the world, he would help [Blue] to sort Hopper out' (Almond 2008, 30). These metanarrative comments show Blue reflecting on his role as narrator. By shape-shifting and by considering Hopper through the eyes of the character he creates in his story, Blue finds a way to deal with his experience of being bullied. After all, the notebook acts as a stand-in for Blue's father who used to provide him with support in dealing with Hopper. Blue recalls telling his father about Hopper, and although his father is able to console his son, he dies shortly afterwards:

"I will have a word with him, but the best plan is just to ignore him. When he sees he's getting no response from you, he'll go away."

But just a few weeks later it was my dad that went away, and Hopper was still there, and when he saw how wounded I was, it was like he smelt blood and started moving in for the kill. (Almond 2008, 16)

In Blue's story, he is able to turn the tables: it is his savage who 'moves in for the kill' by visiting Hopper at night. This story is not just a way of building Blue's self-confidence; it also forms a way to explore where his limits lie when it comes to writing about cruelty and violence. Just as the savage stands above Hopper's bed, axe held up high, the fictional author Blue intervenes, tweaking the savage's intentions by means of interspersing the following metanarrative comment during the writing process:

'And I couldn't do it, not even in a story. Like I said, I'm not a hard lad and now I knew that the savage wasn't either. I'd been writing dead fast. Now I hesitated. The savage lowered his axe. I sighed and wrote on' (Almond 2008, 56). Instead of getting rid of Hopper, the savage punches him in the face, perhaps fulfilling the wish Blue shared with his father that he'd like to 'smash [Hopper's] face in' (Almond 2008, 16). The next morning, Blue heads to school and bumps into Hopper. In the primary narrative, Blue describes the scene: 'I know about the savage in the night. He stood there with an axe, didn't he? He punched you, didn't he? Once, twice, and you were b***** terrified, weren't you?' (Almond 2008, 65-66). Blue then catches Hopper's arm: "'I sent him, Hopper,'" I whispered. "I made him do what he did. Do you believe me?" He said nothing. It was obvious that he didn't know what to believe' (Almond 2008, 66).

Readers are left wondering whether Blue's 'courage to imagine' (Natov 2018) the savage punching Hopper in the night has perhaps driven him to actually punch Hopper, 'sending' himself in the guise of the savage. However, readers may also wonder whether Blue would break into Hopper's house at night to do so. Haynes and Murriss highlight the fact that books such as *The Savage* evoke the notion that 'life itself is not clearly delineated with fixed borders between fantasy and reality' (2012, 127). It is as if the primary narrative has perhaps been infused with the embedded graphic narrative: Blue displays continuity-in-change, blending his selfhood with new traits gleaned from the savage. Perhaps Blue is inventing the part about bumping into Hopper in front of the Co-op and seeing his punched face? After all, Blue pleads readers to believe him: 'Will you believe what happened next? You have to, because it did happen. Because it's true' (Almond 2008, 64).

The penultimate chapter of Blue's story is presented in the same typed font in which the primary narrative has been presented throughout the rest of the novel. Thus, here, Blue no longer writes about the savage in handwriting as he did in the embedded graphic narrative. This chapter sees Blue depicting his visit to the savage's cave: 'I saw him face-to-face like a reflection, and he was just like me, only weirder and wilder and closer to some magic and some darkness and some dreams' (Almond 2008, 73). In the cave, Blue shows the savage his book and his drawings. Then the savage points to his charcoal drawings that he has made of Blue on the cave's wall. Blue is astonished: 'There I was, sitting, leaning over a desk, writing' (Almond 2008, 74). He finds out that the savage started drawing him and his family on the cave walls before he had started narrating his story about the savage: 'The four of us were there together, sitting at a table with smiles on our faces, so happy' (Almond 2008, 75). Blue describes how the savage 'took some chicken feathers from his hair and put them into

mine', and then writes: 'somehow I knew that my wounds would heal, that my sadness would start to fade, and I knew as well that somehow, in some weird way, everything that was happening was true' (Almond 2008, 75-76). Next, the savage puts his arm around Blue, and Blue hears his Dad's voice saying 'I'm with you always' (Almond 2008, 76). On his return home, Blue's mother remarks: 'Here's the savage, come to life in the real world' (Almond 2008, 76-77). Despite the fact that Blue's mother notices the feathers in his hair, this 'savage' element is not depicted on a pictorial level: readers only know about these feathers by means of written language. Blue's adoption of 'savage' traits is only revealed by means of his self-narrative and the metanarrative comments he makes, he does not illustrate himself with 'savage' features at all.

However, Blue does explore such elements in his drawings of the savage boy, projecting physical traits he himself lacks onto the savage. Just after his father dies, Blue describes himself as 'soft' and 'scrawny': 'Right from the start, I tried not to cry. I tried to put on a real tough front. The thing is, I've never really been one of the hard lads. I know how to swagger about when I need to, like most lads do, but like most of us I'm just dead soft inside' (Almond 2008, 15). Blue incorporates the features he would like to emanate into his drawings, illustrating the savage as a sinewy figure with a chiselled jaw, uneven teeth, a bare torso, and ripped jeans. The savage is often depicted in vicious looking stances that convey the 'tough' traits Blue would like to embody. As Ian Williams explains in the *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*, '[m]aking autobiographical comics is a type of symbolic creativity that helps form identity – a way to reconstruct the world, placing fragments of testimony into a meaningful narrative and physically reconstructing the damaged body' (in Czerwiec et al. 2015: 119).

Although Blue's body isn't physically damaged, he does not feel strong enough to carry the burdens of his father's death and the effects of bullying. Williams categorises such burdens as 'The Invisible', or 'a group of conditions, such as mental illnesses, that are not inscribed on the skin of the patient [. . .] but are felt or produce psychological suffering' (2015: 119). In *The Savage*, Blue does have the power over the story he writes, and the outcome of his storytelling endeavours provide a supportive backdrop for him, with the savage acting as a canvas on which Blue can project features he himself lacks. Blue's acts of drawing the savage provide him with 'graphic medicine', which is said to combine 'the principles of narrative medicine with an exploration of the visual systems of comic art' (Czerwiec et al. 2015: 1). While *continuing* to be the Blue Baker readers meet at the beginning of *The Savage*, he also *changes* by adopting some of the savage's character traits. Blue's continuity-in-change is revealed by the metanarrative comments he makes regarding the storywriting

process. After all, 'it is only by changing through time and age that you can ever become yourself' (Pickard 2016, 254). By adopting the savage's features of strength and courage, and by imaginatively testing these traits out in fiction – in his graphic narrative – Blue embodies continuity-in-change while engaging in narrative self-shaping, thereby illustrating the 'discovery potential of creative acts' (Charon et al. 2017, 2).

Shared Stories Symbolizing Continuity-in-Change

This 'coming-of-age journey', as it is deemed by Erica Hateley (2021, 178), ends with Blue deciding that it was time 'to share the story, to let it go' (Almond 2008, 79). He has been able to shape-shift while taking on some of the traits he ascribes to his character 'the savage', assembling his fortitude by inhabiting the savage boy whom he has created on paper. As Hutto points out: 'It is the characters I have encountered, both real and fictional, that serve as models and points of reference for my own self-understanding. I must learn the art of story-telling before I can place myself within a narrative framework' (2016, 26). These facets of shape-shifting suggest that Blue's 'story-driven experience' (Caracciolo 2014, 57) helps him to find a way to heal following the grieving after his father's death: it is when self-narrative and metanarrative blend – with Blue drawing on his character's traits and channelling the savage – that 'the story and the real world [come] together' in the shape of Blue's selfhood (Almond 2008, 79). Blue's 'real world' is infused with 'the story' he has written, a story that sees him evolve.

Blue entrusts his emotions to his notebook in creative ways, all while decentring himself and shape-shifting by means of the guise of the savage, echoing Almond's comments that narrating is like 'a kind of [him], writing about [himself], as if [he] wasn't [himself]' (Almond in Joosen 2020). Blue fictionalises his thoughts and feelings, considering other possibilities in the form of his character 'the savage', and commenting on his story via metanarrative utterances. Instead of merely writing his 'thoughts and feelings down' to grieve his father's death as the counsellor suggests (2008, 7), Blue's acts of storytelling and illustrating in his notebook help him to cope and to heal: these acts function as 'narrative medicine' (Charon et al. 2017) and as 'graphic medicine' (Czerwiec et al. 2015). It is here that the intergenerational creative transposition at work between the adult author and his child character can be established: both David Almond and Blue Baker fictionalise experiences in notebooks, and both use storytelling to produce hope-giving artefacts, as is the case with Blue's *The Savage* and Almond's semi-autobiographical short story collection, *Counting Stars*

(2000). Almond commented on such transformative experiences as follows: 'storywriting, creating any kind of art is an act in some way of healing. Of putting together things that are lost, of reassembling things that have been fractured. And when I wrote those stories that is how it really felt, it was like I was taking some of the troubling things from my own childhood, putting them together again in a way that didn't mean it was totally destructive' (Almond in Joosen 2020).

Just as Almond decided to share his semi-autobiographical story collection with his readership by publishing *Counting Stars*, Blue also chooses to share his tale by passing the 'last bit' of the story over to his mother and sister, 'along with the box with "The Savage" in it' (Almond 2008, 79). Blue finally decides to share what he has written and drawn, and to lift his book into an aesthetic realm as an artefact, thereby symbolizing his continuity-in-change. Blue's sense of loss surrounding his father's death is a life-shaping event that will always be a part of him – an element of continuity – although in his closing words, Blue writes that 'in some weird way, the sadness helped us to get happy again' (Almond 2008, 78), rendering the transformative act of narrating about difficult experiences as an element that can propel change.

Blue shows readers how narrating tales and sharing stories can be empowering, and this across the lifespan. By intertwining vantage points from narrative medicine, cognitive narratology, age studies and children's literature studies in order to analyse complex stories such as Almond's *The Savage*, valuable insights can be revealed: not only with regard to how adult authors depict adolescent characters as storytellers, but also how these young storytellers engage in narrative self-shaping by means of self-narrative, metanarrative and graphic narrative, thereby going through processes of continuity-in-change.

Works Cited

- Almond, David, *Counting Stars*, London: Hodder Children's Books, [2000] 2016.
- Almond, David, *Clay*, London: Hodder Children's Books, [2005] 2016.
- Almond, David, *The Savage*, London: Walker Books, [2008] 2009.
- Almond, David, *My Name Is Mina*, London: Hodder Children's Books, [2010] 2016.
- Almond, David, *The Colour of the Sun*, London: Hodder Children's Books, [2018] 2019.
- Almond, David, 'Acceptance Speech Hans Christian Andersen Award 2010', International Board on Books for Young People, *IBbY*, (September 2010), <https://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=1147>, date accessed: 13 May 2022.

-
- Almond, David, 'David Almond Q&A', in: Michelle Pauli, *The Guardian*, (July 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2011/jul/22/david-almond-q-and-a>, date accessed: 10 March 2022.
- Almond, David, 'On Writing', *David Almond Website*, (2018. Last updated 2021), <https://davidalmond.com/on-writing/>, date accessed: 17 February 2022.
- Almond, David, 'About me', *David Almond Website*, (2017), <https://davidalmond.com/about/>, date accessed: 17 February 2022.
- Almond, David, Interview with Vanessa Joosen for the ERC project 'Constructing Age for Young Readers', (October 2020).
- Athanasidou-Krikelis, Lissi, 'Mapping the Metafictional Picturebook', *Narrative* 28:3 (2020), 355-374, <http://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2020.0017>, date accessed: 20 January 2022.
- Bamberg, Michael, 'Identity and Narration', in: Peter Hühn, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier & Wolf Schmid (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*, 2nd Edition, Vol. 1, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, 241-252.
- Barbieri, Gian Luca, Sara Bennati, Stefano Capretto, Barbara Ghinelli, & Corrado Vecchi, 'Imagination in Narrative Medicine: A Case Study in a Children's Hospital in Italy', in: *Journal of Child Health Care*, 20:4 (2016) 419-427, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1367493515625134>, date accessed: 13 May 2022.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, New York: Zone Books, 2001.
- Caracciolo, Marco, *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.
- Charon, Rita, Sayantani DasGupta, Nellie Hermann, Craig Irvine, Eric R. Marcus, Edgar Rivera Colón, Danielle Spencer & Maura Spiegel, *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017.
- Charon, Rita, 'Why and How Narrative Training Improves the Lives of Patients and Clinicians', *International Conference on Narrative*, 2021.
- Chute, Hillary L. and Marianne DeKoven, 'Introduction: Graphic Narrative', in: *Modern Fiction Studies* 52:4 (2006) 767-782, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2007.0002>, date accessed: 17 February 2022.
- Clark, Andy & David J. Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', in: *Analysis* 58:1 (1998) 7-19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/58.1.7>, date accessed: 13 May 2022.
- Czerwiec, MK, Ian Williams, Susan Merrill Squier, Michael J. Green, Kimberly R. Myers and Scott T. Smith, *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*, University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2015.
- Dennett, Daniel C., *Consciousness Explained*, London: Penguin Books, 1991.

- DeSalvo, Louise, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.
- Fludernik, Monika, 'Metanarrative and Metafictional Commentary: From Metadiscursivity to Metanarration and Metafiction', in *Poetica* 35:1 (2003) 1-39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43028318>, date accessed: 7 December 2021.
- Gardner, Jared & David Herman, 'Graphic Narratives and Narrative Theory: Introduction', in: *SubStance* 40:1 (2011) 3-13, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41300185>, date accessed: 17 February 2022.
- Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Cornell: Cornell UP, [1972] 1980.
- Goyal, Rishi, 'Narration in Medicine', in: Peter Hühn, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier & Wolf Schmid (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*, 2nd Edition, Vol. 1, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, 406-417.
- Hateley, Erica, "'In the hand of the Receivers": The Politics of Literacy in *The Savage* by David Almond and Dave McKean', in: *Children's Literature in Education* 43 (2012) 170-180, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-012-9160-9>, date accessed: 7 December 2021.
- Haynes, Joanna and Karin Murriss, *Picturebooks, Pedagogy and Philosophy*, New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.
- Hutto, Daniel D., 'Narrative Self-Shaping: A Modest Proposal', in: *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15 (2016) 21-41, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11097-014-9352-4>, date accessed: 7 February 2022.
- Hutto, Daniel D., Nicolle Marissa Brancazio & Jarrah Aubourg, 'Narrative Practices in Medicine and Therapy: Philosophical Reflections', in: *Style* 51:3 (2017) 300-317, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/3821>, date accessed: 13 May 2022.
- Hutto, Daniel D. & Erik Myin, *Radicalizing Enactivism: Basic Minds Without Content*. Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2013.
- Hutto, Daniel D. & Erik Myin, *Evolving Enactivism: Basic Minds Meet Content*, Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2017.
- Joosen, Vanessa, 'Second Childhoods and Intergenerational Dialogues: How Children's Literature Studies and Age Studies Can Supplement Each Other', in: *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 40:2 (2015) 126-140, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2015.0016>, date accessed: 7 February 2022.
- Joosen, Vanessa, 'Children's Literature: Young Readers, Older Authors', in: Sarah Falcus, Heike Hartung and Raquel Medina (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Ageing in Literature and Film*, London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming.

-
- Malafouris, Lambros, 'Creative *Thinging*: The Feeling of and for Clay', in: *Pragmatics and Cognition* 22:2 (2014) 140-158, <https://doi.org/10.1075/pc.22.1.08mal>, date accessed: 7 December 2021.
- Natov, Roni, *The Courage to Imagine: The Child Hero in Children's Literature*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018.
- Nodelman, Perry, 'Living Just Beyond the Wall: Versions of the Savage in David Almond's Novels', in: Rosemary Ross Johnston (ed.), *David Almond*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 31-49.
- Neumann, Birgit and Ansgar Nünning, 'Metanarration and Metafiction', in: Peter Hühn, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier & Wolf Schmid (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*, 2nd Edition, Vol. 1., Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, 344-352.
- Nünning, Ansgar, 'On Metanarrative: Towards a Definition, a Typology and an Outline of the Functions of Metanarrative Commentary', in: John Pier (ed.), *The Dynamics of Narrative Form*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004, 11-57.
- Pickard, Susan, *Age Studies: A Sociological Examination of How We Age and Are Aged Through the Life Course*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2016.
- Slors, Marc, Leon de Bruin & Derek Strijbos, *Philosophy of Mind, Brain and Behaviour*, Amsterdam: Boom, 2015.
- Tandoi, Eve, 'Hybrid Novels for Children and Young Adults', in: Cléméntine Beauvais and Maria Nikolajeva (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2017, 329-335.
- Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson & Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, [1991] 2016.
- Wheelwright, Philip, *Heraclitus*, Princeton & London: Princeton & Oxford UP, 1959.

About the Author

Emma-Louise Silva is a postdoctoral researcher aboard the ERC-project 'Constructing Age for Young Readers', led by Vanessa Joosen at the University of Antwerp. Within the project she focuses on age studies, cognitive narratology, genetic criticism and philosophy of mind in children's literature. She combines this role with a lecturing position at the University of Antwerp, where she teaches the 'Joyce Seminar'. As a member of the Centre for Manuscript Genetics, Emma-Louise defended her doctoral dissertation on James Joyce and cognition in 2019. She co-edited *James Joyce and the Arts* (Brill 2020) and *Modernism* (Academia Press 2021), and she has published in the *James Joyce Literary Supplement* (2018), the *James Joyce Quarterly* (2019), *Genetic Joyce Studies* (2020), and *Joyce Without Borders* (forthcoming).

Notes

¹ This article was written as part of the research project Constructing Age for Young Readers (CAFYR), led by Vanessa Joosen at the University of Antwerp (2019-2024). This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 804920).

² Nünning's essay first appeared in German as 'Mimesis des Erzählens: Prolegomena zu einer Wirkungsästhetik, Typologie und Funktionsgeschichte des Akts des Erzählens und der Metanarration' (2001), which was reworked into an English-language publication as 'On Metanarrative: Towards a Definition, a Typology and an Outline of the Functions of Metanarrative Commentary', featuring in *The Dynamics of Narrative Form* (2004: 11-57).

³ To avoid the potential ambiguity between metanarrative comments and metafiction, Fludernik uses the term 'metanarrative' exclusively with regard to 'self-reflexive statements referring to the discourse and its constructedness' and limits the term metafiction to 'self-reflexive utterances about the inventedness of the story' (Fludernik qtd. in Neumann and Nünning 2014: 350).

⁴ Such reflections reverberate throughout Almond's *Skellig*, too: the 'girl next door' Mina explains to Michael that '[d]rawing makes you look at the world more closely. It helps you to see what you're looking at more clearly' ([1998] 2013: 24), and Miss Clarts, Michael's teacher, sends him a note (while he is off school due to tension at home involving his ill baby sister) that says 'No real homework. Write a story. Get well soon!' ([1998] 2013: 83).

⁵ Almond worked as a teacher in his twenties: 'I worked with primary age children, very young children and I worked with adults who could neither read nor write, I dealt with children with special needs, and I think that was very instructive to me as a writer, to work with children who literally could not write, to work with children who found it difficult to speak and I think a lot of writing is like that, it is doing something that is really hard' (Almond in Joosen 2020; see also the section 'About me' on Almond's website 2017).