Moving around children's fiction: agentic and impossible mobilities

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Abstract

Children's imagined mobilities are determined by a range of interactions, not least through engagement with fictional stories in which childhood itself is imagined, written and re-written, interpreted and re-interpreted. Too often children's imagined mobilities are overlooked in favour of more instrumental approaches to their mobilities. Drawing from a spatialised literary tradition and a growing focus on literature in mobility studies, this article poses the possibility that imagined mobilities extend the agency of children in an 'impossible' adultist world.

Keywords

children

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Introduction

The potential of engaging with literature, as this special edition illustrates, has been embraced by the mobilities field, which is by definition transdisciplinary. Scholars including Pearce (2012, 2014), Merriman (2007) and Mom (2015) have demonstrated the ways in which mobility histories

can be illuminated through literary accounts. This is not to say that the acceptance of literature as a research tool travels unproblematically between disciplines. As Crawshaw and Fowler (2008, 457) argue, literary narrative is not 'mimetic' in revealing aspects of social life that may otherwise go unseen but 'can only be applied retrospectively to life in society, precisely because it is the fictional translation of the process which draws attention to it in the first place.' This retrospective feature of literary texts is useful when considering the role of fiction in placing mobilities in their historical context. Fictional narratives require interpretation by researchers in this vein, but also undergo a process of meaning-making as they are read and re-read. In this way the reader is implicated not only in the interpretative research process but, in Barthes' terms, as the 'co-author of the score' in the 'practical collaboration' of fiction-making (Barthes 1989, 63). As Watson argues, the story 'opens up a space in which the ideas surrounding "an alternative politics" can be developed and interrogated' (Watson 2011, 40). This 'alternative politics' is perhaps more readily interrogated in relation to gender (see for example Murray and Vincent 2014): one can look to texts written by men and women in particular contexts.

The interrogation of children's literature is more problematic given that it is written by adults. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that children's literature is rarely included in literary studies of mobilities (with notable exceptions such as Merriman 2007), despite the significance of emotional and imagined mobilities/mobility imaginations (Murray and Mand 2013). Although not specific to children, Crawshaw and Fowler (2008, 457) discuss the difficulties of studying literature as 'modes of representation' that 'characterize the patterns of thought of a notional social group'. It becomes particularly problematic to explore children's literature in this way: an alternative reading is based on seeking understandings of the 'creative process', in 'identifying the processes that have previously conditioned the representation in writing of experiences undergone by similar social groups at specific times and in particular places'. In this article, we follow previous scholars at the interface of social science and humanities in recognising the co-production of the imagined and

lived. In positing 'the case for the place of children's literature in the understanding of children's geographies', Bavidge (2006, 320) wrestles with the ways in which hierarchies of power are determined through children's literature, particularly children's relationships with the city. Bavidge articulates the tension evident when adults present children's stories as characteristic of the voice of children in a certain time and space.

Through a selection of children's fiction, we explore the impossibilities of children's mobilities in relation to their 'adultist' context. Emerging from social studies of childhood, the term is used in relation to the ways in which the discourses and practices of childhood are constructed through adult-centred processes (James et al., 1998). This is the 'impossible relation between adult and child', where the adult always comes first as 'author, maker, giver and the child comes after' (Rose 1994, 1-2 cited in Bavidge: 323). Children's agentic mobilities should always be explored within this context (Barker 2009; Murray 2015). These adultist accounts may be based on memories of childhood, but a childhood remembered as an adult, with accumulated experience. Bavidge questions whether this literature 'speaks about, to, or for children' (320). When looking for gendered accounts we, as female scholars, can look to female writers (Murray and Vincent 2014), but this is not possible with children. With this in mind, rather than seeking situated accounts of children's mobilities, we explore the mobilities present in children's literature and how stories situate children and childhood in relation to mobilities as a 'source of contemplation of children's [mobile] spaces' (Bavidge 2006, 321).

Margaret Drabble has classified children's literature at large, and fiction in particular, in terms of its intention towards the child reader, whether this be imaginative and entertaining, morally instructive, or a form of social commentary reflective of the readers' background (Drabble 2000, 198). The implication of an adultist perspective is apparent here. Drabble also draws attention to a perceptible divide between pre- and post-1950s books, with a reliance on the fantastical in the earlier period,

and a growth in real-world adventures following the Second World War (Drabble 2000, 199). While numerous suitable titles present themselves for consideration, it is impossible to undertake a vast survey within the scope of the present article. We have therefore chosen works of fiction aimed *towards* children from each of Drabble's implied classifications: texts which explore the tensions that arise when children are 'permitted' mobility within, and without, the adult world, and which offer a consideration of the relationships between children and adults through this lens.

In interrogating these texts from a mobilities perspective, we contribute to a key aspect of Sheller and Urry's original call for a new approach to mobilities that sought to understand 'how the spatialities of social life presuppose (and frequently involve conflict over) both the actual and the *imagined* movement of people from place to place, person to person, event to event' (Sheller and Urry 2006, 298, emphasis added). The 'imagined' is still underexplored and this is especially the case for research on children's mobilities, which are arguably more often punctuated with the imagined. This entails, for us, moving between disciplines and adopting a transdisciplinary approach (Murray and Upstone 2014). We are also mindful of the impact of children's literature on children's mobilities. As Bavidge argues, 'children's literature represents one of the most powerful manifestations of the ways in which the world is interpreted and explained to children' (ibid). The following discusses how children and childhood are constructed through mobilities in children's literature, with particular focus on the tension between the impossibility of children's mobility in adultist contexts and the agency of children in determining their own mobilities. We offer the premise that the fictional world of the text – and the imagined mobilities it contains – represent freedoms and levels of agency that are not possible.

Constructing agentic spaces of mobilities

In the stories we discuss here children are transported in flying elevators, peaches, wardrobes and envelopes. Children's literature contends with aspects of mobilities that are beyond the mundane,

that are fantastical: as in science fiction, they are boundless multi-directional and multi-scalar movements, free from technical limitations. They are subterranean in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; vertical in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* and *James and the Giant Peach*; trans-temporal in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and, well, 'flat' in *Flat Stanley.* As Hewitt and Graham (2014) argue, regarding the relationship between the vertical spaces of science fiction and the city, the fantastical and real have a reciprocity where fiction constructs the space and space produces particular literary representations. Here, fantastical mobilities become part of children's mobile imaginary and therefore part of their mobilities. Research with children has indicated that such imaginaries are often highly significant in relation to children appropriating their mobilities and demonstrating their mobile agency (see for example Murray and Mand 2013). Here we examine the ways in which mobile spaces are constructed as agentic, providing the potential for children to determine their own mobilities, and consider how children are presented as agentic beings in children's literature.

In literature from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, mobile spaces are constructed as liminal spaces with transformative potential (Bavidge 2006). For example, in Merriman's (2007, 169) discussion of *The Mystery of the Motorway* by Robert Martin, the M1, he suggests, 'serves as a space of excitement, modernity and danger' and the book is thus a 'social manual for boys entering their teens'. The mobile space of the motorway becomes an in-between space of childhood transition. In E Nesbitt's *The Railway Children*, the railway is depicted as a 'heterotopic space' (Bavidge 2006, 320). In the second half of the 20th century, these mobile spaces are bridges between the world of fantasy and reality; the wardrobe transports the children to Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; the peach carries James away from the reality of his abusive aunts in *James and the Giant Peach*; the elevator in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* takes Charlie and his family to space; the bridge takes Jesse and Leslie to Terabithia; and the space between platforms nine and ten at King's Cross Station transports the children to Hogwarts School

of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the *Harry Potter* series. The latter has become so significant in mobile imaginaries that it has been incorporated into mobility infrastructure, with a mock-up of Platform 9³/₄ at Kings Cross Station in London now a popular tourist attraction. This is also indicative of how space is transformed through fiction and continues to be remade through the imaginary, for example as locations for film adaptations. Both The Keighley & Worth Valley Railway in Yorkshire and the Bluebell Railway in Sussex are marketed as key locations for the 1970 and 1999 adaptations of Nesbitt's book. But such is the strength of the discourse in children's literature around spaces such as Narnia and Wonderland, they have come to 'operate as metonyms for childhood itself' (Bavidge 2006, 324).

In *The Railway Children*, three siblings encounter a number of adventures through their proximity to the railway. The adventures depict tensions between the children's agency and the moral landscape in which they are situated. For example, when they use their red petticoats to warn the train of the landslide that has obstructed the track, their attention is drawn by the nuisance the heavy petticoats are on a hot day.

> ''Oh how hot I am!' She said 'and I thought it was going to be cold; I wish we hadn't put on our – ' she stopped short, and then ended in quite a different tone – 'our flannel petticoats'.' (Nesbitt, [1906] 2015, 46)

This reference to the immobilising aspect of children's clothing at that time is contrasted with the moral imperative around preventing harm. Disaster is averted as the children use the petticoats to make flags to wave down the train. The railway provides not only a source of adventure but also a promise of something beyond; most notably it leads to the children's father, who has been wrongly imprisoned in London. The book is written at a time when the railway was a symbol of modernism and a manifestation of the relationship between modernism and mobility. Children were incidental

to the workings of the railway; the rules were clear about remaining in place; the children are careful to avoid the line itself and are only present in the private spaces of the railway either by accident or invitation.

Children became more of a threat to progress through mobilities in relation to the private automobile. In Mom's (2015, 99) account of Atlantic automobilities in the first half of the twentieth century he found that motorist communities, and specifically the 'Autlergemeinscaft' in Germany called on members to impose discipline on the 'younger generation of motorists'. Children, who 'threw stones, strung ropes across the road, or simply played in the street' were cast as 'other' to the progress of automobility, their threat of sabotage being very much secondary to the 'problem' of child car accident fatalities, which were a significant proportion of all car deaths (Mom 2015, 99). At the same time, fictional series based on motoring aimed at 'youth': *Motor boys* (Clarence Young 1900-1917), *Motor Maids* (Katherine Stokes 1911-1917); *Motor Girls* (Margaret Penrose 1910-1917) and *Automobile girls* (Laura Dent Crane 1910-1913) celebrated the car as a source of adventure, albeit on highly gendered terms (Mom 2015). These 'new' modes of automobile transport, being exciting and novel (and doubly alluring as inaccessible emblems of adulthood), are readily integrated into the children's literature contemporary to them. Once part of the fictional world, they become material for the imagination. When children's literature assimilates the train or the car into fiction, making it part of the imagined, agency is extended to both the child protagonist 'experiencing' the mobility and the child reader imagining it.

As automobilisation is a process from which children are excluded (Barker 2009), an alternative to appropriating the motor car as a source of imagined mobility and agency is to create a fantastic form of automobility, possible only in fiction. Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1973) depict examples of boundless and fantastical automobilities, but also the material 'realities' of children's mobility. For James, a change in family

circumstances with the death of his parents means that he is forced to live with his abusive aunts who are intent on immobilising him, thus indicating the ways in which children are often immobilized in an adult world. However, he escapes this symbol of adult control via a giant peach that magically appears on a tree in the garden. James is afforded agency by the peach and this continues when, having literally flattened his aunts, the peach becomes a form of transport, taking James and his newly acquired friends, a group of giant invertebrates, across the Atlantic to New York, experiencing various adventures along the way. The peach is transformed by the ingenious and now agentic James into an aircraft, which moves slowly across the ocean. It is not until he encounters motorised aerial transport in New York that he experiences speed in the form of a quick decent. The means of transport in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* is similarly fantastical, the glass elevator operating as a spacecraft. Not only does this tale illustrate the transformative potential of mobilities but it also addresses the immobilities of older age and the transformative powers of intergenerational relations. The older people's travel is particularly contrasted with their immobility in that 'none of them had had their feet on the ground for over twenty years' (Dahl, [1972] 1995, 47). After a mistake by Charlie's grandmother the elevator goes into orbit around the earth and Charlie and his extended family experience weightlessness. It is great adventure for all:

> ''I can fly faster than any of you!' cried Grandpa George, whizzing round and round, his nightgown billowing out behind him like the tail of a parrot.' (Dahl, [1972] 1995, 33)

This is another tale of the subversion of transport and, like *James and the Giant Peach*, of vertical mobility. This not only blurs the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, which are evident in the grandparent's enthusiasm for the alternative mobilities, but also the mobility norms associated with horizontal movement. Such mobility norms privilege the automobile. Hewitt and Graham (2014, 924) argue that scholarly research often remains at this horizontal level of investigation, with

an 'empirical bias towards geographies of the surface'. Instead they suggest that there should be more emphasis on a 'three-dimensional conceptualisation of space'. This might mean extending the possibilities of mobility through the imagination.

The agentic space of mobility in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) is of particular interest when considering the imaginative freedoms available to immobilized children. In this text, fantastical mobility emerges in response to an alternative, constrained space, which has been left behind. The story is set during World War Two, a time of mass military mobilisations on an unprecedented scale and the enforced immobilization of women and children. The four child protagonists are evacuated from London to a large house somewhere in the country: their potential for renewed mobility freedom extends beyond their 'real world' location when they gain access to an 'other' world, Narnia. In stark contrast to the immobilities of war, Narnia is a fantastical place of limitless potential for mobilities, manifest not only in the children's ability to travel over large distances, but also in the availability of foods, such as butter, eggs and sardines, that are in short supply. Such references are reminders of the scale of the children's departure from the realities of wartime Britain. In Narnia, children are not distinguished from adults in terms of roles and practices: as such they are party to aspects of mobility that are not usually accessed by children. The boundary between worlds is to some extent blurred: the house represents a liminal space in the peculiarities of mobility freedom offered to the children, and the wardrobe a conduit between the 'real' world and the fantastical world of Narnia. The lamppost, which lights up the pathway to the wardrobe, is a reminder of the mundanity of life: the landmark that guides Lucy in the early stages of the adventure, and later, all of the children after a long period ruling over Narnia. The wardrobe offers the children mobility affordances (Urry 2007, 50) that enable them to travel not only in space, but also in time. Time, in the 'real' world, stops as they enter the wardrobe so that despite living a lifetime in Narnia, their return to the house is as children, where they are once again subject to 'normal' restrictions.

The children are represented as having power and control in ways that are replicated in Katherine Paterson's 1977 story, *Bridge to Terabithia*. The *Chronicles of Narnia* are cited as a creative reference point for one of the protagonists, Leslie. The other, Jesse, is a withdrawn child who befriends Leslie when she moves to his town. In this story the children's imagining is more deliberatively documented, as they transform the wood across the river into a magical place, inventing mythical creatures that are both friends and foes. In both of these texts, the children are represented as agentic, but only in their time and space and not in the time or space of the adult world. Here, children's agency is represented as social, in that it is visible only in relation to social interdependencies (Murray 2015). Such interdependencies are identified, for example, in recent mobilities research on family mobilities (Holdsworth 2013; Jirón and Iturra 2014). In other stories children are more solitary mobile beings.

The child as agentic psychogeographer

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1866) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872) open with and explore a range of both agentic and impossible mobilities. Alice's adventures are themselves contained by the narrative framing device of dreaming - mobility through the imagination, whether exercised consciously (the waking 'daydream') or subconsciously (sleeping). While Alice accesses Wonderland through falling, shrinking and growing, her adventures in *Through the Looking-Glass* further expand her agency and mobility. The first three chapters of *Through the Looking-Glass* could be read as a compendium of possible, impossible and fantastical mobilities. Alice enters the Looking-Glass world by passing through the mirror above a fireplace in her home (Caroll, [1897] 1982, 28). She becomes the enabler of others' mobility, picking up chess-pieces that have fallen onto the hearth and lifting them onto a table (131); she realises that she is invisible, alarming the chess-pieces who appear to float through the air. She experiences this form of mobility for herself, running down the stairs to explore the house and floating above the steps instead:

'She just kept the tips of her fingers on the hand-rail, and floated gently down without even touching the stairs with her feet: then she floated on through the hall, and would have gone straight out at the door in the same way, if she hadn't caught hold of the door-post. She was getting a little giddy with so much floating in the air, and was rather glad to find herself walking again in the natural way.' (136)

In a world of reflections, Alice must walk away from her desired destination (141). Negotiating the landscape becomes a game of chess, as Alice considers the strategies required to visit any desirable landmarks. As a 'pawn' in the game of the text, Alice's mobility is slow and limited compared to the Red Queen's, who can move several squares at once in any direction. Alice must run to stay still: as the Red Queen explains, '*here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place' (145). At the opening of Chapter III, Alice has finally reached the hill by walking away from it: from this topographical high-point she takes in the landscape and considers her route:

'Of course the first thing to do was to make a grand survey of the country she was going to travel through. 'It's something very like learning geography,' thought Alice, as she stood on tiptoe in hopes of being able to see a little further.' (148)

Pausing to survey the fantastical landscape, Alice could be seen as imposing herself upon it, attempting a rational mapping of the world. But such an adultist approach is not in her nature: Alice's pause is brief and her pose as 'geographer' quickly dissolves.

While mobility, whether boundless or contained, is often functional, children's 'purposeless' mobility can also be seen as liberating and, to some extent, subversive. Mobility without

predetermined purpose becomes a means of accessing 'spontaneous' adventures, thereby challenging the norm: a proactive form of wandering that enables change. This aimless movement or 'bimbling', for Anderson (2004, 257), presents the opportunity to 're-connect with the surrounding environment that you were there to politicize and protect'. However, in mobilities research precedence is often given to more instrumental approaches. In the *Alice* books, Alice is not on a quest – her journeys serve no purpose and her experiences achieve no goal. Alice's mobility is perpetuated by curiosity and opportunity: as such, her journeys in Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world are essentially dérives through fantastical landscapes. She is more psychogeographer than geographer. Debord's definition of the dérive as 'a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences' suits Alice's approach, as does the notion that dérives 'involve playful-constructive behavior'. Debord's theory relies on absolute agency: the dériveur must be at complete liberty to challenge the 'constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones'. Alice demonstrates this agency through her playfulness and openness, exploring the worlds in the spirit of the dériveur, who should 'let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there' (Debord, [1959] 2006, 62). Alice's occasional flashes of rebellion suit the practice too: as Merlin Coverley states in *Psychogeography*, 'the dérive takes the wanderer out of the realm of the disinterested spectator or artistic practitioner and places him in a subversive position' (Coverley, 2010, 97).

Alice's openness to the possible, her acceptance of chance encounters and her challenges to authority figures in the text – representations of adult rules and constructions such as the Guard in *Through the Looking-Glass* and the Judge in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* - make Alice, as protagonist, an effective psychogeographer. The *Alice* books demonstrate a possible extension of Debord's theory and the practice of the dérive: in the world of the imagination, children can also be psychogeographers. The lone child, a figure whose autonomy and agency is severely limited in the 'real' world', has access through literature to psychogeographical practices that depend

categorically upon the freedoms of adulthood. These texts also highlight the possibilities of creating knowledge to challenge prevalent modes of mobility, through attendance to less purposeful and aimless mobilities.

More recent examples of the 'lone child' figure as practitioner of the dérive can also be found in Roger Hargreaves's long-running *Mr Men* (1971-) and *Little Misses* (1981-) series. In many of these picture books the Mr Men take long, solitary walks which result in chance, life-changing encounters. Although walking in the *Mr Men* series sometimes serves an ostensible purpose – such as Mr Noisy or Little Miss Curious walking to the shops – walks are often undertaken without a defined goal, as a psychogeographer approaches the dérive or a flâneur wanders: attentive walking for its own sake, the walker open to possibility. As a simple and independent mode of mobility, walking gives the Mr Men a level of agency that is immediately relatable for young children from toddler age. The Mr Men and Little Misses themselves are child-like: simply-delineated protagonists with extreme characteristics, embodiments of facets of childhood experience and identity, summarised and defined by their names. The child reader (or child being read to) can easily identify with these characters: the Mr Men and Little Misses inhabit worlds that reflect the adult constructions of 'real' experience, governed by familiar moral and behavioural codes. Perceived 'wrongdoers' such as Mr Mean, Mr Chatterbox and Mr Nosey are censored and chastised by 'adult' authority figures (a Wizard, Mr Bowler the hat-shop owner and the people of Tiddletown respectively). While adult constructions are prevalent, it is independent mobility that provides the catalyst for change: walking opens the characters to experiences and encounters that challenge their perceptions and enable them to re-evaluate their established identities. Misters Mean, Chatterbox and Nosey are subject to magical transformations and pranks which also occur while out walking, leading them to reconsider and adjust their behaviour.

Walks that lead to transformative encounters are key to the narratives of *Mr Uppity* (Hargreaves,

1972), *Mr Worry* (Hargreaves, 1978) and *Mr Jelly* (Hargreaves, 1976). Mr Uppity's rudeness is 'cured' after he meets a goblin when out walking in his gardens and follows the creature to his own land. Mr Worry's walk sees him meet and express concern for others until he encounters a wizard who promises to remove his worries forever. Mr Jelly's nervous walk takes him into a field where he comes across a sleeping tramp, whose snores he mistakes for a roaring lion, and who teaches him how to face his fears. In a metafictional twist on this narrative device, the heroine of *Little Miss Star* (Hargreaves, 1984) is unsure how to achieve her longed-for fame until she spots the contents of a bookshop window while out walking, and decides to seek out the author Roger Hargreaves, in whose book she then appears. Mobility is equally important to characters whose role is to enable positive change. In one of the first books in the series, Mr Happy, like Alice, comes across a small door in a tree:

> 'One day, while Mr Happy was out walking through the tall trees in those woods near
> his home, he came across something which was really rather extraordinary.
> There in the trunk of one of the very tall trees was a door…
> "I wonder who lives there?" thought Mr Happy to himself...' (Hargreaves, 1971, 13)

Mr Happy follows a staircase in the tree to another door, behind which he finds his opposite, Mr Miserable. Mr Happy takes Mr Miserable home with him and slowly transforms him into a cheerful Doppelganger. Similarly, the dérive in *Mr Wrong* (Hargreaves, 1978) leads to an encounter with Mr Right, also out for a walk and coming from the opposite direction. Mr Wrong's stay at Mr Right's house leads to a merging of identities: Mr Wrong's faults are corrected, and Mr Right's perfections are duly dented. Thus, mobility and identity - and in narrative terms, personal growth or character development - are linked. Much as James's travels on the giant peach, mobility in the Mr Men series can also ensure that misplaced characters find their rightful homes. Mr Sneeze (Hargreaves, 1971) walks from Coldland until he can find somewhere warm enough to stop his sneezing. The

unappreciated Mr Good (Hargreaves, 2003) sets off for a long walk that takes him far from his native Badland to the idyllic Goodland, where he decides to start life anew. In all of these examples, a psychogeographical approach extends the agency of the protagonist. While the means of mobility itself - walking - remains simple and accessible, the opportunity for adventure and experience expands far beyond the parameters of the 'real'. No fantastical vehicles of mobility are required: rather, it is the agentic attitude of the walker that gives rise to the possibilities and events which follow.

While walking remains a dominant form of mobility in the *Mr Men* and *Little Misses* series, forms of automobility are also apparent in some of the later books. *Little Miss Stubborn* (Hargreaves, 1990) employs a misdirected bus journey as well as wilful walking through snow and ice. In *Little Miss Sunshine* (Hargreaves, 1981) the ebullient heroine is driving home from holiday when she comes across Miseryland. In the recent franchised title, *Mr Men in London* (Hargreaves, 2015), released in conjunction with London Transport, various characters from the series visit the sites of the city via public transport, including subterranean travel on the Tube. Although the mobilities in Hargreaves's books are by nature 'realistic' rather than impossible, they offer the characters employing them, and the readers imagining them, access to the experiences beyond the everyday, and open vistas onto the fantastical, magical and absurd. Even within the adultist constraints of Misterland, mobility offers new and unexpected freedoms to the child-like protagonists and, by extension, the child reader.

Children's impossible mobilities

Children's fiction allows children access to real world mobilities normally closed to them - such as walking unaccompanied or driving a car. However, impossible or fantastical mobilities, that are by their nature fictional, offer other freedoms and levels of agency. As stated above, the *Alice* books

provide numerous examples of impossible mobilities, which unfold from the moment Alice pursues the White Rabbit in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

> 'The rabbit hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well.' (Caroll, [1897] 1982, 10)

Once falling, Alice is able to right herself, look about her, remove a jar from a shelf she passes and muse about bats and cats. At no point does she show fear or concern about her situation, or wonder how she will get safely out of the hole: she has accepted the journey, with its curious (and later, curiouser) rules, and is open to the consequences. Thereafter, Alice grows and shrinks as a result of eating and drinking, changes which are at first accidental, but later deliberately controlled by Alice to increase her mobility. Alice shrinks in an attempt to fit through the little door that leads to the White Queen's garden, but once small, can no longer reach the golden key to unlock the door (14). She grows again to reach the key, 'opening out like the largest telescope that ever was' (16), and is then too large to fit through the door. When Alice picks up a fan she begins to shrink again, slipping into a pool of her own tears and mistaking them for the sea: ''and in that case I can go back by railway,' she said to herself' (20), referring back to the 'real world' childhood experience of coastal travel. But Alice is subject to the impossible logic of Wonderland, where the 'normal' rules of travel do not apply. Instead she must swim to the bank that has formed around her tears, along with other creatures displaced by the sudden flood (23).

By Chapter V Alice has the means to grow and shrink at will by eating alternate sides of the caterpillar's mushroom (Caroll, [1897] 1982, 48): a fantastical mobility that gives her access to the remaining adventures in the text, and ultimately enables her to enter the longed-for garden (68). On

waking from the Wonderland dream, Alice relates her adventures to her sister, transferring her experiences through the telling of a story (110). At the close of the book, Alice's sister is herself transported to Wonderland through the vivid scenes described by Alice and the agency of her own 'dreaming' imagination, a direct example of vicarious experience through story:

> 'So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality … and the sneeze of the baby, the shriek of the Gryphon, and all the other queer noises, would change (she knew) to the confused clamour of the busy farm-yard…' (111)

Impossible mobilities also propel Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*. In order to reach the 'Third Square' and thus progress through the game and the landscape, Alice jumps 'over the first of six little brooks' (Caroll, [1897] 1982, 149), enacting the capturing of pawns in chess. She is immediately transported to a seat in a railway carriage, where she comes under the scrutiny of her fellow passengers; challenged by the Guard, Alice has no ticket, leading the passengers to consider how to send her back again:

> ''She'll have to go back from here as luggage!'… 'She must go by post, as she's got a head on her −' 'She must be sent as a message by the telegraph −' 'She must draw the train herself the rest of the way −,' and so on.' (150)

These impossible mobilities are casually suggested by the inhabitants of the Looking-Glass world, implying that any means of transporting inanimate objects are equally valid mobilities for animate creatures (and little girls). As the Looking-Glass world is populated by 'living' objects, such as the animated and speaking chess-pieces, these mobilities are a simple extension of the fantastical world's logic. Although she does not react directly to the suggestions of being telegraphed or

posted, Alice grows impatient with the journey and her fellow passengers, and longs to return to the landscape:

> ''I don't belong to this railway journey at all – I was in a wood just now – and I wish I could get back there!'' (151)

The railway carriage is confining, bringing Alice into confrontation with authority figures just as a lone child travelling in the 'real' world would attract attention from censorious adults. The Guard criticises her for going 'the wrong way'; the gentleman in white paper declares that 'so young a child…ought to know which way she's going' (150). Despite the frustrations of negotiating the Looking-Glass world, walking is a form of mobility that gives Alice a stronger sense of agency, and it is this that she wishes to return to. The train obligingly jumps over another brook, taking Alice back to the landscape and into the 'Fourth Square' (152). This action sees a return to more straightforward movement: from here on, Alice walks through the landscape and jumps over brooks into new squares. Alice's final mobile adventure in Chapter V sees her rowing, with knitting-needle oars (180), in a stream that begins and ends in a shop, its shelves packed with curiosities which are themselves too mobile to catch.

> ''Things flow about so here!' she said at last in a plaintive tone, after she had spent a minute or so in vainly pursuing a large bright thing, that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes like a work-box, and was always in the shelf above the one she was looking at.' (179)

What is perhaps most striking about the fantastical mobilities in both *Alice* books is Alice's own sanguine attitude towards them. From the first fall in the rabbit-hole to the jumping of chess squares, Alice accepts the bizarre and illogical modes of mobility in these worlds. However, her

preference for walking, along with the self-governed mobilities of floating, shrinking and growing, suggest that Alice ultimately wishes to be in control of events. Once she has entered into the adventures made possible by the initial, fantastical modes of mobility, Alice applies her own independent agency to explore the worlds she inhabits. Thus, the fantastical mobilities act rather like psychogeographic catapults, catalysts to Alice's dérives.

In Jeff Brown's *Flat Stanley* (1964), the fantastical transformation of the protagonist's body itself enables impossible modes of mobility in a realistic setting. After being flattened by a falling bulletin board (Brown, [1964] 2012, 4), Stanley, otherwise unharmed, tests his new-found mobility by accessing previously inaccessible places. Stanley discovers that he can go in and out of closed rooms 'just by lying down and sliding through the crack at the bottom' of the door (7). He rescues his mother's dropped ring by lowering himself between the bars of a grating, tied to a shoelace (11). In an echo of Alice's train journey in the Looking-Glass world, Stanley's parents slide him into a large brown envelope and send him by airmail to visit relatives in California (16). His relatives post him back at the end of his stay in an envelope of their own design (18). As well as extending his own sense of agency, Stanley's flatness proves convenient for others. Saturday afternoon outings become 'easier' once Stanley is flat: Mr Lambchop discovers that he can 'roll Stanley up without hurting him', tie him with string and carry him as a parcel, and 'hold on to Arthur with the other hand' (22). This form of mobility suits the harassed father, struggling to manage two small boys in a crowd; Stanley is equally happy to oblige. 'Stanley did not mind being carried because he had never much liked to walk' (22). Stanley also attempts to please his brother Arthur by attaching a spool of string to his waist and acting as a kite (27); but the excitement of this form of mobility is so great that Stanley flies independently, leaving Arthur far below:

'Everyone in the park stood still to watch. Stanley swooped right and then left in long, matched swoops. He held his arms by his sides and zoomed at the ground like a rocket

and curved up again towards the sun. He slideslipped and circled, and made figures of eights and crosses and a star.

… After a while, of course, people grew tired of watching and Arthur got tired of running about with the empty spool. Stanley went right on though, showing off.' (28-9)

Disgruntled, Arthur joins some friends in the park, leaving the spool wedged in a tree and Stanley stuck in the branches (31).

Although inhabiting a 'realistic' world, subject to adult constructions and conventions, the characters in *Flat Stanley* are quick to accept Stanley's transformation and rationalise it. His parents, Mr & Mrs Lambchop, are 'quite proud' of their flat son (Brown, [1964] 2012, 7) and allow him to explore his new mobility. Arthur is jealous of Stanley's flatness (7) and the attention it attracts (24). Lacking Stanley's additional mobility, Arthur feels the constrictions of his own limited agency keenly (26).

Eventually, Stanley's flatness becomes a tool for adult justice in the Museum Thieves episode: despite feeling 'disgusted' (Brown, [1964] 2012, 42) by the humiliating disguise he must wear, Stanley is obliged to pose as a shepherdess in a portrait to capture a pair of art thieves (51). The capture of the Museum Thieves leads to Stanley's celebrity, but once adults have made use of his mobility in this way, fame soon sours for Stanley. Perhaps, in the eyes of his peers, Stanley has compromised his agency by assisting authority figures (in this case, the police): when his mobility is no longer a form of autonomy, it ceases to be desirable. As seen in the kite episode, Stanley's 'otherness' is entertaining, but it is beyond the normal social rules of play that other children are subject to. Following the Museum Thief episode, Stanley is subject to increasing ridicule by other children (54), and his isolation causes him to reject his flatness. Stanley complains to Arthur, who hears him crying in the night:

''I'm just not happy any more. I'm tired of being flat. I want to be a proper shape again,

like other people. But I'll have to go on being flat for ever. It makes me sick.'' (57)

Arthur offers to help Stanley return to his previous form, and in a second fantastical transformation 're-inflates' Stanley with a bicycle pump (59). When the boys' parents see Stanley, they are delighted:

''GEORGE!' said Mrs Lambchop. 'Stanley's round again!'

'You're right!' said Mr Lambchop, noticing. 'Good for you, Stanley!'

'I'm the one who did it,' Arthur said. 'I blew him up.'

Everyone was terribly excited and happy, of course. Mrs Lambchop made hot chocolate

to celebrate the occasion, and several toasts were drunk to Arthur for his cleverness.

When the little party was over, Mr and Mrs Lambchop tucked the boys back into their

beds and kissed them, and then they turned out the light. 'Goodnight,' they said.' (62-

3).

Impossible changes to the body, such as Alice's sudden growing and shrinking and Stanley's flatness, offer a form of agency that is essentially embodied, with attendant means of experiencing and negotiating the world. Stanley's return to three-dimensional form signifies the end of his adventures in mobility and the close of the book. Although at first he tests his unique mobility, challenging the boundaries of the possible, Stanley's otherness is assimilated into the adult status quo. Unlike the assertive Alice or adventurous James, Stanley's agency is limited by a complicit attitude and willingness to be guided by - perhaps even collude with - adult rules and constructions. Ultimately, Stanley's difference, and his resulting mobility, is a blip - a fantastic interlude of independence in a world monitored and controlled by adults. The notion of impossible mobilities

therefore, challenges the prominence of everyday, lived mobilities. This follows from Lefebvre's representational space in which 'the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects' (Lefebvre 1991, 39).

Immobilising children and childhood

Children's mobilities are depicted through a range of impossibilities, and these relate not only to mobility practices, but to the ways in which mobilities construct childhood itself. Children's mobilities can be used to represent the normative progression from child to adult. Holdsworth (2013) discusses children's imaginary geographies and the journey as a metaphor for development. She uses the example of Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic, *The Secret Garden* (1911) which details the child Mary's move to her guardian's house in the Yorkshire Moors and her escape to a secret garden, which becomes her place of play but also the source of healing for her cousin Colin. Similarly, for Holdsworth, *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome suggests a tension between adults and children.

Bavidge (2006) also alludes to this theme in her discussion of Ruth Sawyers *Roller Skates* (1938), regarding the incorporation of children's literature into adult fiction as 'generic'. In this text, the child protagonist, Lucinda, is separated from her parents and moved to New York where she is given a pair of roller skates, which she uses to navigate the city. As Bavidge (2006, 326) suggests, 'the skating is associated with an urban freedom Lucinda sees will be denied her as she grows up'. The skates represent childhood as a time to be protected through immobilisation:

> 'Today the skates sang a sorry rhythm, she'd never belong to herself again – not until
> she married and got herself a husband, and then she'd belong to him. Suppose she kept
> on skating in the Park forever!' (Sawyer 1938, 175 in Bavidge 2006, 326).

In a review of Jacqueline Wilson's *The Suitcase Kid* in *The Guardian's* user review section, Pheebz

(2014) says that: 'I have several friends who move from one parent to the other each week, so it made me understand much more how they must feel when they have to pack their case at the end of the week.' The review provides an indication of the power of fiction in determining mobile imaginations. *The Suitcase Kid* is a realist account of a ten-year-old girl, Andy, whose parents have separated, and the only thing she trusts, her toy rabbit Radish. Andy finds herself between homes, trapped in the mobile space between A and B:

> 'I didn't want to go and live at my mum's or my dad's new place. I wanted to stay living in our old place, Mulberry Cottage, the three of us together.' (Wilson, 1992, 7)

> 'I looked at House A. I looked at House B. I looked at Radish. I made her walk one way. I made her walk the other. I made her trek backwards and forwards across the desk.' (12)

Andy resolves to live one week with her mother and the next with her father, existing out of a suitcase as neither home has space for her. She has no place to settle but is constantly mobile. Her mobilities are disrupted – she can no longer walk home from school with her friends but has to travel much further to each house with more complicated journeys.

> 'I come home from school by myself now. There isn't anyone to give me a lift. I have to walk down Seymour Road and around Larkspur Lane and up Victoria Street into the town. I go to the bus station and then, when I'm staying with mum, I get a 29 as far as *The Cricketers* pub and then I have a ten-minute walk. I have to get two buses when I'm at my dad's, a 62 and a 144 and then I have a fifteen-minute walk even after the two bus rides. I'm exhausted, I'm telling you.' (45)

Mobility for Andy is a negative aspect of her life. Like Stanley's rejection of his flatness in favour of normality, Andy yearns to be settled back in Mulberry Cottage with her mother and father, and back to a 'normal' family.

> 'Dad came to collect me on Friday evening I got so excited and fidgety before he came
> that I couldn't even sit still to watch Neighbours. I couldn't wait for him to get here –
> and yet when he tooted his car horn I suddenly clutched Mum and didn't want to go
> after all. It's always like that.' (29)

This is indeed a normative construction of family through mobility and of childhood within it. As Holdsworth (2013, 89) argues, Wilson's depiction of a child moving between the two homes 'underscores a normative expectation that children *should not* be on the move'. Although conceding that the tale offers 'a role model for children going through similar experiences' as well as those who are not, Holdsworth argues that the discourse around children's need for immobility is damaging. Instead, children need to be 'on the move in a mobile world' (Holdsworth 2013, 92).

Conclusion

Through the examples discussed, we have demonstrated that mobilities in children's literature offer an alternative means of presenting children's mobile imaginaries. This presentation or representation is not static but a process of ongoing knowledge creation (Murray and Upstone 2014). Children are depicted as moving without limits; fictional accounts offer mobility affordances that are not accessible to children otherwise. In this way children are represented as socially and individually agentic. Spaces of agency are constructed in response to immobilising contexts, from the railway in *The Railway Children* to the Narnia and Wonderland, perhaps an indication of the increasing automobilisation of the twentieth century, from which children are excluded. Children's agency comes in the form of the dérive, as spontaneous and subversive in the *Alice* books and

perhaps less subtlety contingent in *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*. Agency is possible for all children in literary texts, including very young children in the *Mr Men* series, which offer mobilities that are both simple and independent. Like the journeying in *The Railway Children*, these accounts are moral tales, offering mobility affordances that are situated within mobile norms and adultist boundaries.

In these ways, children's mobilities in fiction are tinged with impossibilities: of the imagined in social worlds that are constructed by adults, the obstructions of the passengers and guards on Alice's train and the bodily transformations appropriated for adult convenience in *Flat Stanley*. Children are often immobilized in fiction; as in *The Suitcase Kid*, it becomes apparent that offering children the affordance of mobile beings in line with adults is just too risky. By presenting fictional accounts of mobility and agency, children's literature offers its readers a vicarious taste of adult freedoms, regardless of whether these are ultimately contained or removed within the narrative. By exploring fantastical mobilities that can never be replicated in the real world, fiction also allows children to imagine a level of mobility and agency that is beyond the experience of adults. As such, children's literature can offer freedoms that are not available to adults or subject to their constraints: a form of imagined mobility and agency without limits.

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