

Travel, Teens, and Tethering

The Impact of Mobile Phones on Childhood Journeys in *Ostrich Boys* and *Unhooking the Moon*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Journey narratives are common in children's literature. Novels such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) use the journey motif as a metaphor for the internal growth and development of their protagonists (Hunt 179). The journey trope is taken up by two contemporary teen novels, *Ostrich Boys* (2008) by Keith Gray and *Unhooking the Moon* (2010) by Gregory Hughes; however, the protagonists in these novels embark upon their respective journeys with an object unavailable to their literary predecessors. Mobile phones, "a highly salient part of many young people's daily lives" (Walsh et al. 334), are present in these contemporary journey narratives.¹ Mobile phones and other technologies are frequently represented in contemporary children's novels, but their impact within the childhood journey narrative has not received significant attention. How is the development of

1 Note that throughout this essay I will use the term 'mobile phone' except in direct quotations from sources that employ the term 'cellphone.'

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fictional characters in childhood journey narratives impacted by the presence of mobile phones? In *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less From Each Other* (2011), sociologist Sherry Turkle describes Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and highlights the "process through which children separate from their parents" (173) in the bildungsroman narrative. Turkle asserts that the "rite of passage is now transformed by technology" (173) and suggests that technology negatively impacts the development of independence in 'real' children (173). This leads us to question whether mobile phones are similarly detrimental to the development of fictional children in these journey narratives. What is the function of mobile phones within these contemporary childhood journeys and what might these examples suggest about contemporary versions of the journey trope? In this essay I will examine the impact of mobile phones on the journeys of child protagonists and argue that the mobile phone can be seen as both a positive point of connection and a 'tethering' device that restricts independence. Drawing on Maria Nikolajeva and Peter Applebaum, I will argue that mobile phones can be considered 'magical objects' allowing the child protagonist to metaphorically travel through time and receive information unavailable to their peers.

2 MOBILE PHONES AS TETHERS TO HOME

The young protagonists in *Ostrich Boys* embark upon a circular journey. Following their friend Ross's tragic death, Blake, Kenny, and Sim decide to take his ashes from Cleethorpes, England to Ross, Scotland. The boys express frustration following Ross's funeral, describe its numerous inadequacies, and agree that "[e]veryone there was a hypocrite' [...] '[e]xcept us'" (29). In "'Home' and 'Not Home' in Children's Stories: Getting There – and Being Worth It" (1993), John C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis explore the movement from 'not home' to 'home' in children's literature differentiating between circular and linear journeys (224, 228). Stott and Francis posit that circular journeys are often precipitated by attitudes held by the protagonists that transform what is otherwise 'home' to a place that is 'not home' (224). Blake, the narrator, explains "I've been let down a lot by adults: by parents who don't listen, teachers who don't care and strangers who presume. But this afternoon had felt like a genuine betrayal" (30); his negative feelings toward parents, teachers, and peers render Cleethorpes 'not home.' Something must occur to shift their attitudes in order to make Cleethorpes

'home.' Blake suggests taking "Ross to Ross, just like he always wanted. There'll be no vicars, no teachers, no parents – just us, his best friends. Doing something for him he always wanted to do. A proper memorial" (31). The boys agree on this and devise a plan to steal Ross's ashes, take the train to Ross, and return the next day (31-79). As they wait for the train to arrive, Blake states "Cleethorpes is also a dead-end: the trains only come this far" (57). This description of their physical location as a dead end suggests that there is no room for growth and development. A journey is necessary to make 'not home' a 'home.'

The protagonists' ability to embark upon their journey is threatened by the presence of mobile phones. At the outset of the journey the boys' phones begin to ring. Blake's phone rings first and he says, "I didn't want to even touch it at first – guessing who was on the other end" and "reluctantly, oh so reluctantly, I took it out to read the caller display" (58) affirming his fear that it is his parents calling. The first mention of mobile phones in the novel creates a link to the boys' parents. In "Keeping in constant touch: The predictors of young Australians' mobile phone involvement" (2011), Shari Walsh et al. state that teens "believe mobile phones symbolise their growing independence from their parents" (334). However, Turkle explains that for "technologically tethered [teenagers], parents can be brought along in an intermediate space, such as that created by the cell-phone" (173). The boys try to ignore their parents by silencing their mobile phones but "the way they buzzed and vibrated was like trying to hold angry pins and needles in the palm of your hand" (Gray 59). Convinced that their endeavour will trigger parental anger, for, as Blake says, "what we were doing now was far worse than spraying a bit of graffiti. Which meant we could land up in even bigger trouble" (56), the protagonists read the assumed emotions of their parents onto their mobile phones and, thus, metaphorically bring their parents along with them on the journey.

The presence of mobile phones can be indicative of underlying power relationships. In the article "Harry Potter – A Return to the Romantic Hero" (2003), Nikolajeva states:

children are allowed, in fiction written for their enlightenment and enjoyment by *adults*, to become strong, brave, rich, powerful, independent – on certain conditions and for a limited time. The most important condition is the physical dislocation and the removal, temporary or permanent, of parental protection, allowing the child protagonist to have the freedom to

explore the world and test the boundaries of independence. (129, emphasis in original)

In order to begin their journey the protagonists must remove the metaphorical presence of their parents. After silencing multiple calls Blake explains that, “[t]here was no way I was going to answer, but I didn’t quite dare switch the phone off either. Ignoring my mum’s call was dangerous enough; switching it off altogether was close to mutiny” (60). Turning off the mobile phone is identified as an act of rebellion against adult authority. Turkle states: “When parents give children cellphones – most of the teenagers I spoke with were given a phone between the ages of nine and thirteen – the gift typically comes with a contract: children are expected to answer their parents’ calls” (173). The protagonists must break the contract implicit in the presence of their mobile phones in order to begin their journey. Kenny exhibits the greatest amount of discomfort in breaking the contract, worrying that his mom will kill him (60). However, Sim explains that Kenny’s mother is “just going to tell you to come home, right?” (60). Ironically, a device often defined by its portability and connection with movement (*mobile phone*) threatens the protagonists’ freedom of movement. The boys agree to turn off their mobile phones until they have completed their quest and returned home (61). Blake “forced the image of my mum’s angry face out of my mind and pressed down hard on the power button. I felt a little shaky with my defiance but didn’t let it show” (60-61). The mobile phone as a metaphor for parental presence and authority is asserted here as Blake envisions his mother’s face while shutting off his mobile phone, severing the metaphoric tether to his family. Turning off their mobile phones challenges the established power structure “where adults have unlimited power [...] and [children] are subjected to a large number of laws and rules which the adults expect them to obey without interrogation” (Nikolajeva, *Power* 9) and avows the independence of the protagonists.

3 MOBILE PHONES AS SYMBOLS OF INDEPENDENCE

In *Unhooking the Moon*, the acquisition of mobile phones highlights the independence of the protagonists. Unlike the children in Turkle’s research, the protagonists Bob and Marie Claire are not merely given mobile phones by their parents, but are active and empowered in the process of obtaining them. At the outset of the novel Bob and Marie Claire do not possess mobile phones. Bob explains that their

father, John, receives welfare cheques from the government, which he gives to Bob and Marie Claire because he earns enough money to provide for himself and the children with the vegetables he sells from his garden (17). Access to financial resources are mediated through an adult, but this arrangement between the children and their father challenges the established power structure where children “lack economic resources of their own” (Nikolajeva, *Power* 9) as the children are provided access to money with minimal parental input into how it should be used. Their father recommends “buying some clothes this time” (18), but Marie Claire “mouthed the word cellphone; she’d been after one for some time” (18). Discussing the intersection of magic and technology in the *Harry Potter* series, Peter Applebaum wonders if “children are passive, naive recipients of greedy corporate cultural products?” (26). In contrast to this perception of the child consumer as “passive”, Marie Claire, when purchasing the mobile phones, negotiates with the sales clerk and leverages her status as a child to obtain free text messaging (29). The intentional acquisition and negotiation that occurs in the process of obtaining the mobile phones suggests that Marie Claire is not a passive recipient of these cultural products, but rather an empowered agent.

The death of Bob and Marie Claire’s father creates a context in which Turkle’s notion that parents are brought along on the journey by the mobile phone is no longer applicable, as Bob and Marie Claire are, tragically, no longer tethered to a parent. Upon finding their father dead at home, Marie Claire assures her father that “[e]verything’s going to be OK, Dad. We’re going to take good care of you” (58). This reveals a reversal of authority. Marie Claire “took her cellphone from her pocket and walked up the stairs, typing a text as she went” (58). Bob learns that Marie Claire is using her mobile phone to “take care of the funeral arrangements” (58). The acquisition of the mobile phone enables Marie Claire to care for her father as she uses it to arrange his funeral revealing her movement from child to adult.

The death of their father leads Bob and Marie Claire on a linear journey from Winnipeg, Canada to New York City. Stott and Francis posit that within children’s literature linear journeys occur “if the initial setting is a ‘not home’ because it is, in itself, either physically or emotionally unsuitable for the character, then no amount of personal change can turn it into a home” (228). Despite their resourcefulness and independence Bob and Marie Claire are left without someone to provide for their physical needs. Chief White Cloud suggests that they live with foster parents, but Marie Claire says, “I’m not living with foster-parents and I’m not going in a home” (73). Bob concurs that Marie Claire

“needed space, at least twenty acres, to go crazy in” (73). This suggests that Marie Claire’s emotional need for freedom, space, and independence is even greater than her physical needs. Marie Claire is unwilling to submit to adult authority. Winnipeg is ‘not home’ because of the threat it now poses to the children’s autonomy.

4 MOBILE PHONES AS SYMBOLS OF CONNECTION

At the outset of *Ostrich Boys*, mobile phones simultaneously break the familial contract while creating a new contract among the three friends. However, mobile phones later become the site on which the contract between peers is also broken. Once their train journey resumes Kenny and Sim ask Blake to use their limited financial resources to purchase food. Along with their money Blake slips his mobile phone into his front pocket (184). Once safely hidden from his friends and “feeling both sneaky and nervous” (185), he takes out his phone and turns it on. Walsh et al state that “social influences, in particular in-group norms (how much a behaviourally relevant reference group engages in the activity), impact on mobile phone behaviour” (334). Up to this point Blake adheres to the contract he made with Kenny and Sim. Turkle explains that “[a]dolescent autonomy is not just about separation from parents. Adolescents also need to separate from each other. They experience their friendships as both sustaining and constraining” and adds that “a technology-enabled social contract demands continual peer presence” (174). Blake removes that continual peer presence by hiding in the toilet. However, as he breaks the contract due to his unrelenting curiosity about what is taking place back home the mobile phone is re-established as a tether to the authority figures who threaten his autonomy. Turkle states that “[t]raditional views of adolescent development take autonomy and strong personal boundaries as reliable signs of a successfully maturing self” (174), but questions these traditional views as she notes that this “‘gold standard’ of autonomy validated a style that was culturally ‘male’. Women (and indeed, many men) have an emotional style that defines itself not by boundaries but through relationships” (175). Blake’s act of separating from his peers in order to reconnect with his family through his mobile phone reveals a more nuanced movement toward maturation and autonomy than the straightforward traditional view of a “bounded self” (Turkle 175).

The gendered use of mobile phones is significant in *Ostrich Boys*. Blake states: “I’d never admitted to the others that I’d cried when I’d found out about his [Ross’s] death, but no way did I think for one second that we’d ever talk about it. We claimed we were the closest friends in the whole world, yet there were certain things we couldn’t share – there was always a front to keep up” (69). Although the boys are connected by their shared attitude regarding Ross’s death and funeral, and other people’s treatment of Ross, they keep secrets from each other. Later on in their journey the boys encounter a group of girls. Kayleigh says, “I don’t know if boys even really have best friends” (253). Blake protests, explaining that he talks to his friends “[w]henver we see each other” (254). But Kayleigh quickly counters Blake’s assertion: “*We* phone each other every night, and send each other texts all the time too” (254, emphasis in original). Similarly, Kayleigh describes the mobile phone as a focal point of connection among her female friends and suggests that Blake, Kenny, and Sim are emotionally disconnected from each other because they do not use their phones to communicate. At the outset of the novel the (parent-child) connections symbolised by the mobile phones threaten the autonomy of the protagonists. However, as the journey continues, connection to others becomes increasingly important to the growth of the characters.

Mobile phones serve as a metaphor for connection throughout *Unhooking the Moon*. This is particularly true for Marie Claire. Even prior to purchasing their mobile phones, Marie Claire is described as someone who is highly connected culturally, spiritually, and within her community. She speaks multiple languages (25, 53), lays claim to a variety of cultures based on the place of her birth and the nationality of her parents (5, 8), and is excellent at doing accents (6). Bob, using his nickname for Marie Claire ‘the Rat’, states, “the Rat was strange. She said things that came true” (2) and explains that he “never let her out of my sight but the Rat knew everybody and everybody knew the Rat” (26). Bob suggests a connection between Marie Claire and technology when he states that she “has memory like RAM” (50). Marie Claire initiates the purchase of the mobile phones and utilises her mobile phone to establish connection upon the death of their father. In the final chapters of the novel Marie Claire goes missing in Times Square. Bob sees her briefly in the back of a police car, but then she is gone (298). Bob says, “When I woke it was daylight. I reached for my phone but it wasn’t there” (299). Bob loses his only physical connection to Marie Claire suggesting a break in his emotional connection with her as well. He discovers his phone safely in the hands of Tommy (299), one of the children’s adult helpers. Tommy states, “I was scared she’d send you a message and you wouldn’t hear it” (299), revealing

doubt in Bob's ability to care for Marie Claire. Tommy comes to this conclusion without consulting Bob, forcing Bob into an involuntary state of dependence on adults for information about Marie Claire. This suggests a shift in the lives of the children away from full autonomy and toward an involuntary dependence on adults. Joey, another adult helper, adds, "I tried calling her, Bob, [...] But her phone's switched off" (299). That the symbol of Marie Claire's connection to Bob, to Winnipeg, and to her friends is switched off, foreshadows Marie Claire's ultimate disconnection from reality.

5 MOBILE PHONES AS MAGICAL OBJECTS

In her discussion of *Harry Potter* in relation to heroic narratives, Nikolajeva explains that the romantic hero on a quest "is empowered by being able to travel through space and time, by possessing magical objects" ("Harry Potter" 127). In *Ostrich Boys* and *Unhooking the Moon*, mobile phones can be seen to serve as 'magical objects' that enable the characters to metaphorically travel through time. In *Ostrich Boys*, Blake ducks into "a Tardis toilet" (185), a reference to the time-travelling vehicle used in *Doctor Who*, to use his mobile phone. The allusion to time travel in connection with the use of the mobile phone suggests a relationship between the act of using the mobile phone and time travel. The mobile phone enables metaphorical time travel as Blake receives voice and text messages delivered hours before. Once Blake turns on his mobile phone he is metaphorically transported back to Cleethorpes and the people he left behind and, thus, mentally and emotionally travelling through space.

Mobile phones also enable metaphorical time travel in *Unhooking the Moon*. In a fantastical turn of events, Bob and Marie Claire are invited to stay in the home of Iceman, Marie Claire's favourite rapper (233-257). Iceman's girlfriend, Mia, threatens to contact the authorities and place the children in a home if he does not discontinue contact with them. Bob asserts throughout the novel that Marie Claire couldn't handle being put in a home. "She's crazy and they'd try to make her normal" (68). The children flee and return to their hideout in Central Park (257). Once there, Bob says, "I felt lonely then, and more afraid. [...] I checked the time on my cellphone. There was a message from Little Joe. 'Miss Gabriella Felip Mendez told me that you and Marie Claire were on TV with Iceman. All of Winnipeg is talking about it!'" (260). Bob is connected to Winnipeg and his friends via his mobile phone as well as other technologies and "then,

somehow, I felt like I wasn't alone" (261). The mobile phone transports him, metaphorically and emotionally, from his isolated position in the rain and darkness of Central Park to a place where he feels more at home.

In their descriptions of 'magical objects' Nikolajeva, Applebaum, and Charles Elster focus on fantasy texts. However, the functioning of mobile phones as magical objects in *Unhooking the Moon* and *Ostrich Boys* demonstrates that it is possible to apply their readings to the realist narratives found in these texts. Alongside facilitating metaphorical travel in time and space, Blake's mobile phone also serves as a magical object in the sense of a "trick, spell, or code [that] lets [him] do things other people do not know about yet" (Applebaum 40). The mobile phone is the site upon which Blake explores and discovers information about home to which neither Kenny nor Sim are privy. Blake switches on his mobile phone once inside the toilet and it "searched for my network" (185). This can be read as the literal wireless network that enables mobile phones to function, but also the metaphorical network of his family and friends, most of whom remain in Cleethorpes. Once his phone is turned on he says, "I suddenly wasn't sure I wanted to know who'd been trying to contact me. But too late. The phone beeped with every text message and missed call. [...] Thirty texts. Thirty missed calls. It was full. It didn't have the capacity to store any more" (185). Here the phone serves as a metaphor for Blake's capacity to understand and accept the impact of his actions. Blake does not have the capacity to take in any more information about himself or others, which becomes evident when he states that he "doesn't want to know" (185-186) as he switches the phone off. Although he seeks comfort in knowing what is going on at home he is not yet ready to face the consequences of his actions. Minutes later his desire for information is so powerful that he locks himself in the toilet again in order to "check just one missed call and one text" (187). Charles Elster explains that in the *Harry Potter* series "Harry makes use of several magical objects that allow him privileged knowledge" (218). Blake's mobile phone also grants him access to privileged knowledge when he hears a man's voice – deep as a dungeon, solid and thick as a prison wall. I almost dropped the phone when he called himself Detective Sergeant Cropper. But I stabbed button 3 and shoved the phone back in my pocket before he could say much more than '... *caused a lot of trouble and worry...*'" (189, emphasis in original). Once Kenny and Sim realise that Blake has turned on his phone and express their anger about him breaking their pact Blake explains that they are "in big trouble" (193) to which Sim replies, "We'd guessed it was gonna be like that anyway, [...] 'But it was easier when I didn't know for definite.' [...] 'I

just don't want to know about that kind of stuff.' 'Nor me,' Kenny said" (194). Sim and Kenny distance themselves from knowing and understanding while Blake seeks and receives knowledge via his mobile phone. Just as Harry Potter "gets into possession of a large variety of magical agents", which "make him better equipped than his classmates and most of his teachers" (Nikolajeva, *Power* 17), Blake's mobile phone provides him with knowledge that makes him better equipped to consider the consequences of his actions. This moves Blake toward a position of power as Applebaum explains that "[p]ower can emerge out of a persistence in seeking knowledge" (28).

6 MOBILE PHONES AS CARRIERS OF KNOWLEDGE

As the boys continue their journey, Blake obtains new information via his mobile phone. Over the phone Blake learns from his girlfriend, Nina, that Ross "posted a suicide note on the same morning he died" (333). For the entirety of their journey the boys have, like ostriches, kept their heads in the sand denying any possibility that Ross might have committed suicide and their potential role in his decision. Now, Blake receives the truth via his mobile phone and, unlike before, has the capacity to face this undeniably uncomfortable fact suggesting his developing maturity. However, Sim is unable to accept the truth, unable to move beyond his anger and so "smacked the phone right out of my hand and stamped it to pieces" (335). The mobile phone is used to deliver the uncomfortable truth that Ross's death was a suicide and serves as a symbol for Blake and Sim's ability to maturely grapple with this uncomfortable fact.

Ostrich Boys challenges cultural perceptions that mobile phone use decreases empathy in young adults (cf. *Growing Up Digital* 3), for it portrays mobile phones as objects that can provide teens with the information they need to develop empathy and complex relationships. Sim "grabbed up his rucksack and [...] pushed through the gap in the hedge back onto the road" (337) and Blake and Kenny "watched him go" (337). Sim cuts short his journey and his development. Kenny also shortens his journey and leaves Blake to complete the journey alone. Later, Kenny meets Blake in Ross, but Kenny is driven by an adult (347). As Turkle states, "[t]ethered children know they have a parent on tap – a text or a call away" (172). Kenny uses a phone to contact an adult signifying his inability to make the journey on his own and thus a lack of independence. Blake wrestles with Ross's suicide and feels "sorry that I hadn't noticed what had been happening to Ross

[...] Of course we'd known. We caused some of it. [...] I wished so hard that he'd talked to me" (340). Blake remembers Ross as "secretive" (339) and states, "[h]e was still trying to hide everything inside right up until the end" (349). Kenny says, "Yeah, but doing that meant we couldn't help him" (349) suggesting that communication and connection could have saved Ross's life. Blake recognises the value of the strong emotional connection described by Kayleigh and symbolised by the mobile phone. Blake moves toward acceptance when he takes "Ross's urn out and put it in the thick grass next to me. Now that I was here, now that I'd made it, I didn't know what to do. This wasn't going to bring him back, was it?" (345). Blake wrestles with his feelings about Ross's suicide and realises that "[w]e've been blaming them all along, but... but I can't think of *anybody* who's blameless anymore" (351, emphasis in original). Blake's attitude changes, in large part, due to the information received on his mobile phone and this change in attitude suggests that he is emotionally ready to return home.

Mobile phones also serve as carriers of knowledge in *Unhooking the Moon*. Iceman asks Bob how he knows that Marie Claire is in Don Children's Home. Bob says "She sent me a text message" (306). Marie Claire loses her autonomy when she is picked up by the police who symbolise adult authority. The police place her in the children's home and she reveals, via her mobile phone, that the adults who run the children's home are paedophiles (304). Up to this point, Marie Claire is an empowered and resourceful child, but she now needs to be rescued and communicates this via the mobile phone. When Bob arrives to rescue Marie Claire she explains that these dangerous adults "took my cell and locked me in this goddamn cupboard" (326). Marie Claire loses her connection to Bob, her friends, and her community when her mobile phone is taken. Being placed under adult authority by the police already reveals a loss of autonomy, but being physically confined to the small cupboard further illustrates her loss of freedom and independence. Bob physically recovers Marie Claire, but ultimately loses connection with her: "She was saying something but I couldn't hear what it was. [...] She was starting to speak but no words came out" (333). Eventually, Marie Claire's ability to communicate deteriorates (338-339) and she loses her connection to the world altogether.

Once they escape from Don Children's Home, the news is "on every single channel" (337) which means that the children's friends in Winnipeg will see them on the news. However, Bob soon realises that he has lost his mobile phone and so while his friends will virtually have contact with him, he has lost his connection to them. At the outset of the novel, Marie Claire declares that "Winnipeg is the

way the world is meant to be” (8) and, at the end of the novel, Bob says, “I like living in New York, it’s become a second home, but I still miss Winnipeg” (353). New York does not become ‘home’ for Bob and Marie Claire. Although the children’s physical needs are met as they come under the care of their uncle, their emotional needs, particularly Marie Claire’s, are not met. This challenges Stott and Francis’ theory that, conventionally, a linear journey will lead a child to a place of physical and emotional safety. The children experience difficulties and varying levels of change, but this change is not described as positive. In New York, the children are placed within the traditional hierarchy of adult over child, or, as Nikolajeva describes, an ‘aetonormative’ power structure with the adult as the normalised position and holder of power, while the child is ‘othered’ and disempowered. The children are not at home and, in Marie Claire’s case, cannot even function. In line with Nikolajeva’s observation that children in bildungsroman narratives are only meant to become empowered for a period of time, Marie Claire’s empowerment is unacceptable within the traditional hierarchy of adult over child and she is completely removed from reality. Nikolajeva suggests that “[m]ore usually, the protagonist gradually accepts the adult normativity, and thus, leaving adolescence behind and entering adulthood, becomes ready to exercise the same oppression that he has been subjected to” (*Power* 7). Although begrudgingly, Bob ultimately accepts his uncle’s power over his own life and that of Marie Claire. While this fits with the normative model of development, Bob’s indifference and lack of acceptance of New York suggests that neither protagonist ever makes it home.

7 CONCLUSION

Mobile phones impact the childhood journey narratives found in *Ostrich Boys* and *Unhooking the Moon* in a variety of ways. In *Ostrich Boys*, mobile phones initially threaten the protagonists’ independence. In *Unhooking the Moon*, mobile phones signify the protagonists’ existing independence. In both texts mobile phones serve as a metaphor for connection to parents, peers, self, and home. Rather than facilitating a straightforward Home-Away-Home journey arc, in these contemporary journey narratives, mobile phones complicate the journey. As a metaphor for development, the journey becomes more nuanced as the separation from home, family, and peers is disrupted by the presence of the mobile phone.

The presence of mobile phones reveals a tension between autonomy and connection reflecting a central struggle for many children growing up in an era of continually advancing technology. Both *Ostrich Boys* and *Unhooking the Moon* speak to cultural concerns and questions raised by sociologists, teachers, doctors, and parents about the impact of mobile phones on child development. Nevertheless, these texts also challenge cultural assumptions about the potential harm caused to children and their development by mobile phones. The notion that empathy in adolescents is threatened by mobile phones is reversed in *Ostrich Boys*. This suggests that children's journey narratives can reflect alternative possibilities for technology as it is used by adolescents. This poses new possibilities and challenges within the childhood journey narrative.

One of the possibilities created by the presence of mobile phones in *Ostrich Boys* and *Unhooking the Moon* is the use of these everyday objects as 'magical objects'. Turkle suggests that mobile phones only create the illusion of empowerment for children. However, delivering knowledge and insight, mobile phones offer the possibility for genuine empowerment of children within fiction. This suggests the potential for technology to reflect a more privileged status of the child within contemporary journey narratives, which in turn reveals possibilities for how 'real' children and their caregivers view technology. Just as the mobile phone opens up new possibilities and poses new challenges in contemporary life so too does it open new possibilities and pose new challenges in children's literature. James MacDonald states that "[t]echnology, in other words, is a necessary development for human beings in that it is the means of externalizing the potential that lies within" (75). The presence of mobile phones in the journey narratives *Ostrich Boys* and *Unhooking the Moon* reveals aspects of what lies within the adolescent characters and the potential that children's journey narratives have to disrupt cultural assumptions around children and technology.

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