

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## Towards an Assemblage Approach to Literary Geography

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**Abstract:**

Over recent years literary geography has adopted a relational approach to its subject matter. This article continues this move, suggesting that assemblage theory can help develop the sub-discipline in two interrelated ways. Firstly, at a project level, assemblage theory enables literary geographers to identify all components that have agency and influence on fiction (including authors, translators, publishers, readers, places, etc.). As part of this first argument, the article develops Hones' concept of reading fiction as a 'spatial event' (Hones 2008, 2014). This article interacts with Hones' textual 'happening' to emphasise the valency of fiction on 'extra-textual' geographies. It offers a short case study from the work of novelist Tessa Hadley to illustrate this valency. Secondly, at the sub-disciplinary level, the article argues that assemblage theory may offer a common ground which allows scholars from both literary and geographical positions to locate their writings in the broader set of approaches that define literary geographies.

Keywords: spatial event; assemblage; novel; Tessa Hadley; *The London Train*; Cardiff

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## Introduction

To both literature and geography, place matters. Following the humanist and cultural turn in the 1970s and 80s (Cosgrove and Duncan 1993; Cosgrove and Jackson 1987; Tuan 1974, 1976), many geographers now insist that humans are spatial beings; who we are, what we do, and how we conceive of ourselves is influenced to a large extent by where we are (Casey 2000, 2001; Preston 2003). To geographers, place is vital to human identity, as Soja confirms:

As intrinsically spatial beings [...] we are at all times engaged and enmeshed in shaping our socialised spatialities and, simultaneously, being shaped by them. (Soja 2010: 18)

As a consequence of these relations, literature has witnessed a growth in interest from human geographers (Brosseau 1994; Cameron 2012; Cooper and Gregory 2011; Johnson 2004; Lahaie 2008; Pocock 1981; Sharp 2000; Yap 2011). Akin to their 'real world' counterparts, fictional narratives and characters are recognised as similarly tied to spatial settings and geographical contexts; as Piatti et. al. observe, it is 'impossible to even think of literature without any spatial context' (2008: 4). Geographers therefore have looked to literature as one site through which the extraordinary relations between people and place (following Madanipour, Holloway, and Hubbard 2001) can be investigated. Fiction is considered to be a form of cartography that can help us understand the nature of *homo geographicus* (Sack 1997), it is a route map to help engage with the ways humans locate themselves and relate to the world.

However, due to the variety of approaches that distinguish human geography, allied to the many lines of inquiry apparent in literary studies, the field of literary geographies is often defined by 'gaps and disconnections' between works (Hones 2014: 164). Some human geographers may be interested in plotting locational reference points on maps; others may look to compare fictional cities with real geographies. Some literary scholars may focus their attention on the role that place plays in structuring a narrative, whilst others may explore how geographical fictions are interpreted and experienced by their readers. This myriad of approaches may all 'talk the language' of literary geography, but also may talk past and beyond one another due to their differing interests and conflicting epistemologies. Thus as Hones states,

In the current moment, as I write, studies in literature and geography as a whole are neither generating nor (as a result) collaborating in a coherently common academic space; this makes it very difficult to understand the relative positions of thematically adjacent but relationally distant work, because the production of multiple disconnected spaces means that it is not easy to gain a coherent overview. (Hones 2014: 166)

The pages of this journal are one space through which a common ground for the sub-discipline can be created and debated, and this article is a contribution to this end. The article suggests that the relational turn within the social sciences in general can offer literary

geographies an opportunity to fashion a common space through reconsidering the nature of associations within this complexity. This relational turn provides the impetus to rethink the fixed and singular chunks of all (sub-) disciplines and refashion them in new, more useful ways. To paraphrase Latour, it offers the opportunity to ‘redefine the notion of [literary geographies... and] trace [its] connections again’. (Latour 2005: 1). The article suggests that the concept of assemblage can help us in this process. At a project level, assemblage theory enables literary geographers to identify all components that have agency and influence in fiction (including authors, translators, publishers, readers, places etc.). From this basis, this article interacts with Hones’ concept of reading fiction as a ‘spatial event’ (Hones 2008, 2014) in order to emphasise the valency of this happening on ‘extra-textual’ (or ‘real world’) geographies. This valency will be illustrated through a short case study of the assemblages created by this reader’s engagement with the novel *The London Train* by Tessa Hadley (2012). Through this process the article presents the assemblage approach to answer calls to not only ‘better understand the impact of stories on the production of places’, but also, ‘grasp the nature of the different aspects of this interaction and how to conceptualise it’ (Caquard and Fiest 2014: 18). The article thus presents the case that assemblage theory can help re-define the sub-discipline as a literary geography of associations.

### Rethinking relations

A relational approach to understanding the world has grown in popularity in recent years (see Doel 1999; Latour 1999; Murdoch 2006). According to Jones (2009: 487), a relational approach challenges scholars by insisting that the world is constituted as ‘an open-ended, mobile, networked, and actor-centred geographic becoming’. Relational thinking therefore marks a shift away from independent conceptual categories of the modern constitution (Latour 1993), and towards considering units as part of actor-centred networks. As Barnes notes, relational thinking attends

to the networks of relations that crosscut, interleave and fold across [fossilised categories of the modern], and form hybrid collectives. [...] It is by undertaking this [approach] that we enter the ‘middle kingdom’, and see the world before it is torn in two.... (Barnes 2005: 72)

Relational thinking does not consider ‘concepts’, ‘things’, or ‘networks’ as ‘a priori’ in the world, but rather considers them to be continually ephemeral, (re)composing, and emergent (see also Whatmore 1999: 31-2). As Latour puts it in relation to the modern category of the ‘social’: the social ‘does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but *a type of connection* between things that are not themselves social’ (2005: 5, emphasis in original). From this perspective, as Haraway tells us, the connection (or relation) is the smallest and perhaps the most appropriate ‘unit of analysis’ (2003: 20). No longer do the fixed independent chunks of the modern constitution hold sway (after Laurier and Philo 1999), but these now give way to an *inter* dependent epistemology where *things* are

always acting and being acted upon by *everything* else. From this perspective each component (or *thing*) is not discrete and singular, but its nature and meaning changes due to its position in a relation. This is a challenging and radical approach to take. As Latour admits,

At first, this [approach] seems absurd since it risks diluting [categories and, in this case, sub-disciplines] [...] But this is precisely the point[.] [T]his alternative branch of social theory wishes to [show how] all those heterogeneous elements *might be* assembled anew in some given state of affairs. (Latour 2005: 5)

As a result, the relational approach acknowledges that ‘ambiguity, uncertainty and instability [will] always [...] haunt efforts to generate the certain and the definitive’ (Smith 2001: 131); it is a paradigmatic shift that ensures that taken for granted entities, ‘are never stabilised, normalised, sedimented or structured’ (after Rose 2002: 385). In sum, the relational turn ‘rearticulat[es] the way we see, understand and thus live the world’ (Dewsbury 2011: 148).

### **Relational pages and places**

The relational turn can be identified within both literary studies and geography over recent years. In comparative isolation to one another, both geographical and literary scholars have recognised the range of relevant actors that can come to influence place and literature, and thus be the centre of any relational geographic becoming. Conceptualisations of literature have developed from being understood as an objective rendering of the reality of the world (approached by the scholar from a detached, positivist epistemology) into being understood as a situated interpretation of the world created by the author and their characters (see Sharp 2000). Through acknowledging the increasingly positioned geography of authorial intent (be it an attempt at neutrality or otherwise), scholars have also identified the necessity of exploring the geography of reception (after Sharp, in Johnson 2004: 92). Following Barthes (1977), we as readers have come to be positioned not as passive consumers of authorial purpose, but rather enjoying the agency to produce our own reading of any fiction. Indeed, a reader’s (re)construction of any text is now seen as a vital component in understanding fiction, as Cameron states, ‘stories demand interpretation’ from a reader (2012: 574), our production of meaning becomes ‘the very essence of literature’ (Ljungberg 2003: 174; also cited in Piatti and Hurni 2009: 340).

Thus over time, literary scholars (and now literary geographers) have come to challenge the perceived stability and homogeneity of literature and the characters and places within them. Texts are no longer framed as fixed and singular, but have a variety of interpretations based on authorial intent and audience (re)interpretation. Fictions are now framed as ‘phenomenal’ in nature, they encourage the ‘complex production of meaning and effect [...] from dynamic interaction’ between a reader, their imagination, pre-existing knowledge, and the work of the author (Drucker 2008, cited in Barnes 2013: 166). This challenge to the perceived stability and singularity of a fictional text has converged with a broader move in geography to see cultures, practices and places as forms of text that can be

read, interpreted, and performed (see Anderson 2010; Duncan 2004; Geertz 1977). Geographical sites have been reframed as dynamic and plural, rather than fixed and singular (for a full review see Anderson 2010; Massey 2005). Where once scholars would contend that it is every geographical site's, '*persistent sameness and unity* which allows [it] to be differentiated from others' (Relph 1976: 45, my emphasis), places are now argued to be 'always in a process of dynamic unfolding and becoming' (Rose 2002: 385). As a result of these complementary shifts in perspective, both fictions and geographies are now understood as 'culturally produced [and] differentially enacted through embodied practice' (Ogborn 2005–2006: 148). In short, both fiction and geographies are considered as actor-centred 'ongoing compositions' (see Anderson 2010).

These shifts towards the relational in literary and geographical studies suggest that both disciplines are increasingly occupying complementary epistemological ground. One example of how literary geographies have sought to harness the relational turn is Hones' re-articulation of fiction as a 'spatial event'.

### **New ground for geography and literature: fiction as a spatial event**

According to Sheila Hones, fiction is a spatial event (2008, 2014). In her view, a fictional work 'happens' through the 'intermingled processes of writing, publishing, and reading' (2014: 19). Reflecting the relational turn, this framing suggests that fiction is not completed when it is written, but this apparent end point simply begins a new process of editing, translating, proofing, typesetting, designing, marketing, positioning in a (virtual or material) shop, purchasing, reading, and reflection. Hones reminds us of the explicitly spatial and temporal dimensions of these processes; in Hones' terms the 'happening' of a book is not a singular and isolated occurrence, but rather a connected process which:

emerges [...] as a geographical event, or a series of connected events, which have been unfolding (and continue to unfold) in space and time. (Hones 2014: 19)

In one sense, Hones refers here to something geographers would find axiomatic – that life (and literature) is inherently spatial. But rather than suggesting "simply" that geography is a crucial part of a fictional plot (in the sense that it locates and defines a storyline) or a crucial influence on a writer's practice (in terms of the crucial where of their typing, dictating, or writing habits), the notion of a book as a spatial event suggests a re-thinking of the modern category of 'a book'. It re-articulates the associations that bring a book into being, and goes on to contribute to its nature and meaning over time. In short, this idea emphasises the relational nature of fiction, offering a '[...] spatial view of the writing–reading nexus as a contextualized and always emerging geographical event' (2008: 1301). As Hones describes:

As reader and writer, you and I, we are currently sharing a moment of text-based spatial interaction, a geographical event. We are engaged across distance, participating in an improvisation that is bringing together a broad array of people, places, times,

contexts, networks, and communities. The way in which our spatial event will unfold is both unpredictable and unique: it is emerging at this moment out of the mixing together of my intentions and habits in writing and your purposes and habits in reading. (Hones 2008: 1301)

Hones' notion of the book as a spatial event is a useful example of the ways in which the relational turn in both literary and geographical studies offers an opportunity to create a shared language for the sub-discipline of literary geographies. However, as Hones suggests, 'what happens next?' (2014: 163) to the notion of the book as a spatial event, is up to us. As one response to this question, this article goes on to suggest that the opportunity provided by Hones' work could be developed further through diagnosing and understanding an 'event' of fiction through the notion of assemblage.

### **Assembling relations**

Initially developed by Gilles Deleuze, often with Felix Guattari, assemblage theory offers a challenge to concepts and constitutions which lead us to identify organic, durable, and seamless 'wholes' (see Hegel 1999). As Robbins and Marks outline, the assemblage approach sees the world as 'a dynamic structure [of] semi-stable socio-natural configurations and geographies that emerge over space and time' (2010: 181). Definitively, an assemblage is a component that is formed by the coming together of many other parts. These parts do not come together necessarily by intention or design or have an essential permanence that makes their connection insoluble; rather, their aggregation keeps their coherence as individual units intact but nevertheless forms a larger whole through their connection with others. Thus, from the perspective of assemblage theory, components can join up into assembled wholes, be removed from them, and then become an element of further yet-to-be-assembled 'coming togethers'. These parts therefore are not purely defined by their 'relations of interiority' to the current assemblage, but also defined by their 'relations of exteriority' as part of previous, or indeed, future, coming togethers (see Delanda 2006: 18). Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory therefore insists that entities are never fixed, pre-given, or forever stable in their ontological form. Although they can effect geography and have agential capacity, 'things' are always prone to disassembly and are always 'en route to deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 324). In this sense, assemblage theory emphasises the dynamic, precarious, and emergent qualities of all 'coming togethers'.

It is possible to convert Hones' idea of the book as spatial event into the currency of assemblage (or more precisely in the spirit of the relational approach, not *any* book in the abstract, nor *any* book in terms of its author, title, and published print run, but a specific material or electronic version of *a* book that is read, owned or borrowed by a reader). In the currency of assemblage, a discrete, singular copy of a book is not a simple, straightforward 'thing', or even a collection of discrete 'things' (in terms of accumulated ideas presented by a writer, and engaged with by a reader), but becomes understood as the associations between writer-reader-page-and-place that form its particular meaning and identity. This assembly of

'parts' is itself formed by the intentions, (re)interpretations, social contexts, physical materialities, imaginations, personal memories and collective histories, of the constituent components. From this complex intermingling, this approach acknowledges that the coming together of a 'book' is dynamic and evolving – it is in the flows of ideas, words, materialities, and people that make this assemblage, and due to their precarious nature, components can move on whilst new components can also be added.

Articulating the literary happening of a book as an assemblage thus subtly shifts how we articulate, think, and live literary geographies. Complementing Hones' notion of the book as spatial event, it identifies how a written work is actively negotiated and produced, not simply by an author in isolation, but also by its one and many readers (alongside translators, publishers, etc.). None of these actors passively engage with the assemblage, but actively change its nature; as Latour states, 'all the actors do something and don't just sit there' (2005: 129). Importantly this approach also suggests that these individual actors are not individual at all, but are themselves defined by complex coming together of changing identities and geographies. Just as book becomes a process, so are the individuals that contribute to its ongoing composition (see Anderson 2004; Featherstone 1995; Jameson 1991). As humans are all spatial beings, the expanded field (after Cook 2001; Moss 2001) of material and social geographies also contributes to their broader identity formation processes. All these complex relations come together to form the 'spatial assemblages' of the book. As Robbins and Marks (2010) state,

there is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and the field of representation (the book) and the field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders.... (Robbins and Marks 2010: 179; see also Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 25)

To summarise, we can articulate this assemblage approach as a way to conceptualise and work through a novel as a specific actor-centred geographic becoming. At the first level, a novel is an encounter between writer and reader, joining together their intents and purposes (similar to Hones' spatial event). Yet at the second level it is also a coming together of the people and places of creation and the people and places of consumption – the transitory amalgams which constitute the 'wheres' of writing and the 'wheres' of reading. The assemblage is thus in turn comprised by components which themselves are constituted by various elements coming together. The writer (or the reader) is constituted by their histories (their relations to 'exterior' parts of past assemblages) and their intentions of writing (or reading). These intentions are generated within social contexts, in other words, the broader social and cultural geographies into which the idea of the book was initiated and from which its next form will soon emerge (see Strang 2004). Similarly, the material geographies of creation and consumption, including the place of writing or reading, also have a fundamental role, influencing in part the style, mode or interpretation of the original and subsequent versions of the text.

Framing a book as an assemblage thus encourages us to diagnose the meaningful contingent processes that produce a book, diagnose where the individual component parts have come from, where they are going to, and how they have come together. The relative (in)coherence of the assemblage can then be explored not simply in terms of the materiality of its components or total assembly, but also in terms of their meaning, and their capacity to register affect in authors, readers and critics.

### **From inter-texts to inter-territories**

The assemblage is less about what it is then, and more about what it can do, what it can affect and bring about. (Dewsbury 2011: 150)

every assemblage is basically territorial... [and t]he territory makes the assemblage. (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 503-4)

We have seen thus far how we can understand a fiction as an assemblage. In some senses, one could argue that the conversion of Hones' notion of the book as a spatial event into the currency of assemblage supplements the original notion but does little to add value to it. However, in this section the article will argue that assemblage is a key development for the field of literary geographies because it makes explicit the potential power, or 'valency' (after Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 503-5), of a book in a number of socio-spatial contexts. As Deleuze and Guattari outline, once we have identified the key active components in any assemblage, the more searching questions arise in terms of what this assemblage can do. As Foucault tells us, it is often difficult to ascertain the power of processes, in his words, 'People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what [sic] they do does' (1984: 95). As all assemblages are 'basically territorial' in nature (see Deleuze and Guattari above), it is crucial for literary geographers to explore what affects a book-as-assemblage can have in a range of spatial realms.

Applying the work of Hones (2014: 8), it can be argued that there are three kinds of spatial realm in which a book-as-assemblage can have affects (2014:8). The first and second spatial realm emphasise the literary spaces in which a book-as-assemblage can have affects, and it is these realms which Hones focuses on explicitly in her own writing. Firstly, spatial affects are suggested to occur in fictional spaces, that is the 'intra-textual' geographies of the story within the covers of the book. Secondly, spatial affects can occur in inter-textual literary spaces; in other words, the ways a fictional space directly connects to other stories and narratives already published. Beyond these literary spaces, Hones identifies that it is also possible for a book to have 'extra-textual' affects. These affects refer to the ways a novel can 'make a literal, physical impact on a place', whilst also playing 'a major role in how that place is experienced' (67). Due to her emphasis on the literary affects of books, Hones does not expand further on these 'territorial' consequences of a book-as-assemblage. This article, however, argues these territorial affects should not be seen as secondary or less significant to the intra- or inter-textual spaces that a novel can create; indeed, it suggests that these extra-



textual affects could offer an important realm in which literary geographers can explore and diagnose the appeal and durability of fiction. With reference to the ways in which a novel can ‘make a literal, physical impact on a place’, it is possible for novels to enter into the collective consciousness and have a direct influence on how places are identified, the industries promoted within them (for example tourism), and their liveability and affordability as a consequence. We can see perhaps how Thomas Hardy’s Wessex, Jack Kerouac’s America, or John Steinbeck’s Cannery Row in different ways change the meaning, identity, and activities present in their respective locations (Chiang 2004; Slethaug and Ford 2012; Sukdolova 2013). In these cases, the valency of the book-as-assemblage enrolls further actors and spaces which come to define the field of literary geographies. However, as Hones notes, it is also possible for a novel to play ‘a major role in how [a] place is experienced’ (2014: 67). This role *may* be a consequence of the way a novel has moulded collective consciousness and material geography, but it also may be a result of more personal or ‘psychogeographical’ relations between book and reader. Psychogeography, as Bonnett (2009) recounts, derives from Lettrist and Situationist International practices in the 1950s which sought to reimagine everyday space through new forms of interaction. More recently, there has been a revival in psychogeography across more traditional and literary circles (see for example, Ackroyd 2000, 2007; Ho 2006; Home 1997; Keiller 1994, 1997; Sinclair 2003; see also; Moorcock 1988), and for literary geographies specifically, it is possible for interactions between a book, reader, and location to alter the ‘physical and psychological landscape of the city’ (Pinder 2005: 386) for an individual. Through escaping with imagined characters into fictional places, it is possible for a novel to have a psychogeographical affect on a reader by helping them to ‘re-imagine the forgotten nooks and crannies of ordinary landscapes [and] re-enchanted and re-mythologize prosaic geographies’ (Bonnett 2009: 46). Through engaging with a book set in locations that may range from ‘the realistically rendered [and] highly recognisable[,] to the completely imaginary’ (Piatti and Hurni 2011: 218), a novel changes from an event that has simply ‘textual’ affects, into a spatial assemblage that has the capacity to invent, alter, and influence space not only in the reader’s imagination, but also in terms of more material geographies. The notion of a fiction ‘taking place’ thus suggests an agency and consequence to a book-as-assemblage: it is possible for a book to have an effect on the location in which it fictionally occurred, altering that ‘real’ place’s use, identity, and meaning. In this case, the spatial assemblage of literature has the potential to intermingle with places alongside the other actors that take and make the cultural world; it becomes one contributor to the meaning and identity of the places around us. As a consequence of this, literary geographers need to take seriously not simply the valency of fiction for its own textual world, or other intertextual worlds, but also how it enrolls, transforms, and translates (after Latour 2005: 65) material and psychogeographical territories through the acts of ongoing composition.

Thus this article argues that framing a book as an assemblage helps us to appropriately conceptualise the relations which come together to define the reciprocity between stories, people, and places. In doing so, it suggests the following five key questions which can be

used to help locate ourselves and our inquiries with respect to this new literary geography of associations:

1. What relations of a book (as-assemblage) dominate our interest, and why? (For example, are we interested in the relations between author-character, author-genre, author-place of writing, reader-narrative, reader-character, reader-place, narrative-place, etc.?)
2. What components dominate these relations (e.g. social or material geographies, genres, intertextual spaces, etc.)?
3. What intra-textual and inter-textual spatial realms are created by a book, and how might these be mapped?
4. What is the valency of this book in taking and making extra-textual geographies in particular locations? What do these new assemblages look like, and what in turn do they produce?
5. What insights can be generated from these assemblages to help illuminate the relations between people and place?

The article will now recount a small example to demonstrate this approach to a novel-as-assemblage. Focusing specifically on this reader's engagement with the book *The London Train* (Hadley 2012), it will illustrate how exploring various relations that come together to compose a book can enable insight and critical understanding of the valency of stories at an individual and collective level.

### **Assembling and disassembling *The London Train***

My interest in *The London Train* began whilst undertaking a research project on how geographies and literatures coincide and affect one another (see Anderson 2014). I came across Hadley's work whilst re-reading *The Big Book of Cardiff* (Finch and Davies 2005), a collection of short stories set in the capital of Wales. In the short story *The Trouble with Summer*, Hadley tells of a city neighbourhood where 'nobody knows anybody else, [...] a place of people in transit: bedsits, students, housing association lets, first-time buyer flats' (Hadley 2005: 91-2). This description referred to a particular street in Cardiff – Fanny Street – where the narrator's grandmother lived. Located on the edge of the city centre, Fanny Street was a route I had often cycled to and from work, and its housing types and residents bore an uncanny resemblance to the textual space recorded by Hadley. I was intrigued by the fact that a place in my life, a street in my geographies, had become part of another's fiction. It was as if, in some way, my geographies mattered more through becoming part of another's assemblage; they had been acknowledged, affirmed, and perhaps even enchanted (after Bonnett 2009: 46). From this relation, I was moved to read the blurb on Hadley's new book: *The London Train*. As a geographer, I was intrigued by the notion of strangers forming a relationship in the liminal space of a train, betwixt and between stations, which may be both material and metaphorical. From this interest, I read the book.

*The London Train* is a novel formed around the relations between two protagonists – Cora and Paul – whose lives come together following a meeting on the train of the title. From the family home on the borders of England and Wales, Paul's daughter had run away to London, and in his attempts to find her, Paul becomes, 'entranced by a life set loose from the moorings of marriage, family, and responsibility' (in conversation with Hadley, April 27<sup>th</sup> 2012). Cora is a middle-aged librarian, married to a civil servant, with no children. Following the recent death of her parents, she begins to reflect on the passage of time and the success (or otherwise) of her life.

Although my interest in this book did not centre on the assembled relations between author and narrative, in conversation Hadley revealed that the novel had a difficult birth. Initially conceived as a novella which centred solely on Paul, Hadley's publishers found this original story to be good, but the author herself knew there was something missing. By bringing this novella alongside another (Cora's) story which was then in its early stages of development, Hadley created a new spatial assemblage that became *The London Train*. Hadley intended that Cora's and Paul's two stories should initially appear disconnected to the reader, yet as the reader progresses through the novel, parallels in theme are intended to assemble in the readers' minds, until the two protagonists meet on the train of the title.

In terms of author-character and author-reader relations it is possible, therefore, to read *The London Train* as the charting of two characters whose own assemblages are initially discrete and separate, defined by their own fictional relations of exteriority and interiority. These separate assemblages then physically, emotionally, and geographically come together, producing in turn a new relational assemblage centred directly on Cora and Paul's own association. The reader then discovers whether this association will remain durable, or like many sets of relations, will dissolve 'en route to deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 324).

As stated above, if it were not for the influence of the separate assemblage *The Trouble with Summer* I would not have engaged with these author-character relations, and my own version of this book-as-assemblage would not have been initiated. In a similar psychogeographical vein to my response to the locations in Hadley's short story, whilst reading *The London Train* I found myself siting the scenes from Paul's and Cora's separate, then co-mingled, lives in places in my city. Paul's best friend, Gerald, had a flat that – to me at least – *had* to be by Roath Park, an area of Cardiff a ten minute walk away from Fanny Street. All the details of this (unstated) location rang true to my own experiences of living close to this area and knowing its habitats and cultures; as Hadley describes it:

Gerald's flat was at the top of a tall Victorian house beside one of the city parks. All the heat in the house rose up to his attic and beat in through the slates on the roof; his windows were wide open, but it was still stifling. While Gerald brewed tea, Paul stood at the window looking out into the shady spacious top of a copper beech, one in an avenue planted along the side of the park. A tinkers' lorry, on the lookout for scrap metal, cruised past in bottom gear, and a boy sang out 'Any old iron', riding standing

up among the rusting fridges and cookers. Paul said it was the last of the old street-cries, resonant and poignant as a muezzin. (Hadley 2012: 58)

In a similar way, Cora's story also came to be set, in my mind at least, in a fictionalised version of Cardiff. Cora was employed in a library that bore an uncanny resemblance to Cathays library, a location another short walk from Roath Park (see Figure 1). As Hadley describes, this library:

was at a junction on a busy road carrying traffic in and out of the city from the valleys. It was a Carnegie endowment from the early twentieth century, built like an odd-shaped church with two naves at right angles and high windows of greenish glass, mournfully aloof from the squat, bustling shopping street of fast-food joints, quirky cafes, cheap mini-markets, hairdressers. [...] The staffroom looked over the Victorian city cemetery, a conservation area for wildlife. Sometimes she ate her lunch in there. (Hadley 2012: 175)



Figure 1. Cora's Library? (Author photo).

Through associative resonance between Hadley's story and my own experience, here was a novel re-assembling my world. Through conversation with the author I knew that Hadley

used familiar places to site scenes in her stories (she stated, for example how her son's flat on Pentonville Road in London was the place where Paul's daughter ending up living after running away from home; yet Peter Finch (editor of *The Big Book of Cardiff*) had also suggested that Hadley was reluctant to name specific locations in her novels as she felt she didn't have the right to claim material territories for her own fictional narratives (in conversation with Finch, March 16<sup>th</sup> 2012). As a result, it was not an impossible conclusion to draw that Hadley intended Cora and Paul's city to be recognisable as a Cardiff I knew. *The London Train* was thus creating for me not simply an intra-textual space in which I could escape, nor a cartography that shared and expanded the inter-textual co-ordinates located in *The Trouble with Summer* (Fanny Street and Cathays Library by the way, are joined by just 500 yards and Crwys Road). *The London Train* was also creating a territorial coming together that brought my own life-as-assemblage into composition with this fictional event.

As this association built and became mutually constitutive, I became intrigued as to the possible location of the first meeting between Cora and Paul, following their introduction on the train. A location simply defined as 'a cafe near the park' (Hadley 2012: 240). I imagined this place to be the *Terra Nova Café*, a 'real'-life location on Roath Lake, Cardiff. To me, this was an exciting possibility, so I asked Tessa Hadley if this indeed was the place she had in mind for her protagonists to meet. She answered: 'You think it *should* be the café on Roath Lake but it isn't, that café is too municipal inside. In my imagination the ambience inside is more like *Coffee1* on Wellfield Road' (in conversation with Hadley, April 27<sup>th</sup> 2012).<sup>1</sup> I knew both cafés, and I knew too what Hadley meant about the wipe-clean municipality of *Terra Nova*; nevertheless to me it was definitive: Cora and Paul met in this location. Once that conclusion seized me, every time I passed the *Terra Nova*, and even now, I half-expect(ed) to see Cora reading at a table, looking over the lake. My 'London Train-as-assemblage' had taken on a spatial life of its own – mine.

Recounting, however briefly, my copy of *The London Train-as-assemblage*, it is possible to identify a range of relations that may be of interest to the literary geographer. Initially, for example, author-narrative relations can be identified in order to explore the motivation, origins, and development of particular literary geographies. Secondly, author-character relations can be charted, identifying how two characters whose own assemblages, defined by their own relations of exteriority and interiority, are initially discrete and separate, then come together to produce a new set of associations. Thirdly, one can identify how the author relates these assemblages to the reader, masking and revealing connections and associations in order to guide and (dis)orient the direction of the narrative.

Furthermore, it is possible to map the intra-textual locations of *The London Train*, from Paul's house, to London, to Cardiff, and how these are joined by various train lines and stations. One could also assemble an intertextual cartography connecting this novel with *The Trouble with Summer*. But perhaps most significant for me were the extra-textual affects of the novel. These affects were not a consequence of the popular understanding of the literary geographies of Hadley's work, but through my personal psychogeographical engagement

with the story, and my own experiences of the city in which I determined it to be located. The valency of this assemblage was, therefore, how the ‘tripartite division’ (after Robbins and Marks 2010: 179) between representation, subjectivity, and ‘reality’ were now blurred and co-composed. To paraphrase de Certeau, through assembling with this reader’s own relations and associations, *The London Train* no longer simply ‘expressed’ a place, or ‘limited itself to telling about a location’, rather it ‘made’ this place (1988: 81). Although knowing that this assemblage was not wholly rational or real in a conventional sense, the enchanting valency of fiction had become its ability to move the rational human beyond their conventional understandings, and reassemble the world in whatever way they wanted it to be. As Hadley suggests, this is the childlike, but also alchemical power of fiction: ‘Why do I tell [people] that the characters and places [in my novels] aren’t real? The mystery and magic is that in some sense they *are* real. There’s an element of naiveté in [this position], but an element of magical power too’ (in conversation with Hadley, April 27<sup>th</sup> 2012).

Thus the book as assemblage tells us something about the relations between people and place: from the importance of rooted community to individual identity, the liminal freedom experienced in trains and public spaces (like cafés), and how geographical ties can offer both safety and entrapment (for more see Anderson 2014). Yet the book as assemblage also tells us something about how texts and territories combine and coincide, become durable, and linger in the mind even after their assemblages have appeared to dissolve.

In accounting for the agency of the author, their characters, and the reader (amongst other ‘human’ agents), as well as the influence and associative co-ingredience of intra-, inter-, and extra-textual spaces in all their material and cultural dimensionality, this approach sensitises us to the important role of the imagination which disembeds literary geography from rational cartographies and open up new worlds of psychogeographical plotting (see Anderson 2014).

### **Towards a conclusion**

In this article we have explored the relational turn in both literary and geographical studies. We have seen how this turn has prompted the sub-discipline of literary geographies to adopt approaches that acknowledge the agency and affect of multiple actors, times, and spaces on the creation and consumption of the novel. This relational awareness has enabled the rich traditions of both disciplines to inform literary geographies and allow scholars to use fiction to help us ‘grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle’ (after Jameson cited in Walford Davies 2012: 207), as well as to explore how humans do not simply locate themselves, but define themselves through a sense of place (after Crang 1998).

Sheila Hones’ notion of the novel as a spatial event is a key stage in this process. This article has sought to develop this notion by converting it into the language of assemblages. It has argued that assemblage theory can help address the ‘gaps and disconnections’ that still dog literary geographies by providing a common space in which disparate traditions and questions can be asked, within a shared, assembled frame.

However, adopting assemblage theory can thus not only change how we view the relation between literary and geographical disciplines, it can also change how we view the very nature of a book itself. Not only does assemblage theory extend the conceptualisation of a book away from a singular unit and towards a process that is written, read, interpreted, performed, marketed and judged (with the various temporal and spatial associations such processes require and create). A book at this level is thus an entertainment, an education, or an enlightenment; it is a new set of lenses through which one can take the perspective of the author, learn something from their contributing assemblage, connect it to one's own life, and see the world afresh. However, the assemblage approach does not reduce a book, or its constituent parts, to passivity. In contrast to seeing a book as primarily mobilised by its original author, perhaps to be thoughtlessly consumed by an isolated observing reader, the assemblage approach suggests a book is more than just a lens and becomes instead a tool. A book as an assembled tool enables the reader to use it to view their world, but also engage with and alter it. A book's valency offers the potential for it to be used to build a new world, with a reader's interpretations, motivations, and impulses, assembling together with the worlds of the author. As such, a book becomes more than a technology through which people understand the world (Michael 2000), but has the potential to alter the nature of that world too.

As a consequence, assemblage theory can help create a loose model through which the sub-discipline of literary geography can define itself. It can offer a broad template through which to chart the course that has brought together geography and literature (with their own epistemologies and approaches) to its current position, but also, engage with the shared 'line of flight' (after Deleuze and Guattari 2003) that literary geography scholars will come together to work through in the future. As a consequence, through this approach we can begin to see both novels, and our sub-discipline, as a 'stable location [defined by] unstable converging forces that cannot be delineated either by fences on the [disciplinary] ground or by boundaries in the imagination' (Solnit 2010: VII).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wellfield Road joins Roath Park at its southern tip, Terra Nova is to the north of the park, adjacent to Roath Lake.

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