LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Jack Reacher's Carbon Footprint: Reading Airport Novels Irresponsibly

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Abstract:
This paper examines calls for fiction to not only recognise but address catastrophic climate change, by for instance promoting environmentally-responsible behaviour. It looks at the protagonists of two long-running series of thrillers – Lee Child's Jack Reacher, and Daniel Silva's Gabriel Allon books – considering them as representatives of 'airport fiction', but more specifically tracing the affinities and correspondences between air travel and this kind of popular fiction. I draw out the meaning of air travel in the works of Child and Silva, noting the demands of plot and characterisation, but also discussing the role of genre conventions, framing assumptions, and reading habits that help to define airport fiction. However, I also calibrate the carbon costs of the fictional protagonists in their twenty-year careers, not just to illustrate the significance of flying or not flying, but also to show how easy and straightforward it is to critique popular fiction for its lack of environmental awareness. Besides its contribution to understanding the literary geography of popular thrillers, this paper imagines a 'low-carbon literary criticism' in order to forestall the possibility of an aggressively literal-minded approach to fictional characters' behaviour. The paper argues that scepticism towards the influence of literature is in order, and that the ball is in the court of ecocritics to show that the likes of 'cli-fi' are an effective way of promoting climate-conscious behaviour.

Keywords: ecocriticism; cli-fi; air travel; popular fiction; Lee Child; Daniel Silva.

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Introduction

In a serious and suspicious age (Felski 2011; 2015), it is too much to hope that the pleasures of reading be spared from the imperative of addressing catastrophic climate change. The urgency of the crisis has compelled critics to argue that fiction must recognise not just the reality of anthropogenic global warming, but also its responsibilities. The rise of climate fiction – 'cli-fi' – is only the most obvious manifestation of this deeply felt need to disseminate 'affectively potent proenvironmental narratives' (Schneider-Mayerson 2018: 495). Ecocriticism, more generally, approves the power of fiction to advance 'changes in perceptions, understandings, and expectations' (Thornber 2017: 265). The familiar refrain is that we need stories now more than ever (Bloom 2015, Elmore 2020).[1]

Explicitly didactic fiction, informed by 'ecological sustainability ideology,' is enthusiastically promoted by some, notably where children and young adults are concerned (Bigger and Webb 2010; White, Auld and Wells 2021).[2] Aiming to encourage the 'adults of the future' to 'develop criticality,' Stephen Bigger and Jean Webb explicitly link reading matter with environmental responsibility: 'Because we view stories as potentially empowering for young people, we also consider the extent to which the reading of stories stimulates attitude formation, behaviour change and personal agency in young readers with regard to social and environmental responsibility' (Bigger and Webb 2010: 402). This agenda is hardly representative, and ecocritical approaches that deal with adult readers rarely make quite such bold claims, but the general sentiment is shared: better stories make better people make better behaviour. The emerging canon of cli-fi has been a particularly popular topic for curriculum development (see Johns-Putra 2016; for the canon, see Trexler 2015). It is hard to disagree with such modest and moderate suggestions as 'Literature brings the reader in on an emotional level to shape and develop beliefs and attitudes' (Beach, Share and Webb 2017: 51).[3] But here again are Bigger and Webb, whose clarion is all the more deafening for being directed at children:

> We argue that fiction's concern for heroic action and the victory of good over evil supports the development of 'heroic resisters' who will fight actively against peer pressure, injustice, irresponsibility and unethical behaviour, and who can become agents for change. (Bigger and Webb 2010: 411)[4]

Given such enthusiasm for 'ecological sustainability ideology,' I would not be surprised if like-minded critics and educators soon go a step further, and condemn fictional characters for their environmental failings: fictional lifestyles, as in life, feel ripe for criticism.[5] I don't know of anyone who has actually come out and argued that literary characters should be subject to the same suspicion as those of us in the real world. But here is an early cli-fi review by Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow (2013), singling out the sins of the hapless British physicist Michael Beard, protagonist of Ian McEwan's much-admired *Solar* (2010):

> While Beard embarks on his solar-energy scheme, his personal behavior is both literally contributing to the problem (he flies constantly and has become so fat that, on land, only an SUV can comfortably accommodate him) and symbolic of the lack

> of discipline that has put us in our predicament. As an extremely intelligent creature who exploits those around him and is ultimately self-destructive, he seems to stand in for the entire human species. (Tuhus-Dubrow 2013: 60)

In Tuhus-Dubrow's aggressively literal reading, ethical and environmentally conscious criticism extends seamlessly to character behaviour. It is plainly unnecessary of Tuhus-Dubrow to single out Beard for being 'overweight, short, balding' (Tuhus-Dubrow 2013: 60), in addition to his other supposedly unattractive qualities, but McEwan probably greenlights the idea by presenting his character's greed and selfishness as coequal contributors to the global climate emergency. In this kind of criticism, fat-shaming and flight-shaming go hand in hand.

No-one disapproves of the wider pro-environmental sentiments – why on earth should they? But here we approach some of the difficulties with these zealously ecocritical readings. For *Solar* can only work as environmentally effective fiction so long as the *good* reader, the reader of *literary* fiction, is left in no doubt that profligate lifestyles like these are bad for the planet. But it is of course vanishingly unlikely that Ian McEwan's readers picked up the novel innocent of opinions, somehow being both blank slates as well as highbrowed. Nor is it easy to see how such fiction can shape people's views and their behaviours, unless we imagine that people are to be force-fed environmentally progressive fiction.[6] I venture to suggest that a diet of 'ecological sustainability ideology' is so ardently promoted for children, young adults, and students precisely because in the classroom and the seminar they are more or less captive subjects.[7] There is a bit of support for the idea that stories might change us for the better: in a pioneering foray into 'empirical ecocriticism,' Matthew Schneider-Mayerson (2018) reports the reasonable likelihood that readers of climate fiction are *subsequently* impressed with the urgency of the climate crisis. But his conclusions work only for his test subjects. Where there is a marketplace for fiction, where consumers actually choose what they want to read, it is absurd to think that environmentally- and socially-responsible behaviour can be promoted effectively through this or that fiction, or even whole bookshelves of ecocritically-approved stories.[8] It might be possible to promote environmentally responsible behaviour (by now acronymised as ERB, never a good sign) through book clubs and the like, as part of concerted 'community education' efforts, but as the authors of this suggestion concede, in a little masterpiece of understatement slipped in somewhere near the peroration, 'It is […] difficult to determine just how and why the reading of environmental literature might influence environmental behaviors' (Mobley, Vagias and DeWard 2010: 438). But it isn't just the charming idea that book clubs will save the planet that is the problem. More importantly, 'a *possible* circular relationship between the consumption of environmental literature and environmental attitudes' (Mobley, Vagias and DeWard 2010: 438, emphasis added) is further acknowledged. This is true, but it is far too tentatively put, tantamount to studious avoidance of a fundamental flaw. For the overwhelming likelihood is (d'oh!) that our existing belief systems, along with many other factors, lead us to particular works of fiction and how we consume them, rather than fiction shaping our beliefs and influencing our behaviour in some direct and straightforward fashion.[9]

We might agree in a spirit of generosity that cli-fi makes little difference, but surely does no harm, and after all 'every little helps,' as the cliché has it.[10] But it is the flip side of this argument for literary influence that is more troubling. Going beyond the canon of approved literature, the 'useful stories' that might profitably be taught, should we be worried about the shadow library of books that people read off-curriculum, off-campus, off-piste, wholly untutored in ERB? What if *other* readers – whom we might by extension think of as *bad* readers, readers of *popular* rather than literary fiction – neither fail to see the damage inflicted by characters rolled on to 'stand in' for the entire human species (Tuhus-Dubrow 2013), nor condemn them for their privileges and their lack of collective responsibility (Maughan 2019)? Is there an argument to be made that popular fiction, by ignoring climate change, perhaps even denying it, is part of the problem? Might the wrong kind of stories, read by the wrong kind of readers, actively worsen the climate crisis, at the very least by promoting inaction? For those who are really sold on the power of stories, the presentation of fictional lifestyles in popular fiction might then start to become significant. Worse still: what if readers admire and even seek to *emulate* environmentally irresponsible fictional protagonists in the real world? I have in mind here Stefan Gössling's recent argument about the impact of celebrities on travel habits and attitudes to global warming. Considering the influence of celebrity lifestyles on young people, Gössling insists that air travel as an intrinsic element of personal 'branding' contributes to the 'revolving door of non-progress' (Gössling 2019: 9) that is current climate mitigation. Is it too much of a stretch to foresee a case for the role of *fictional characters* 'in shaping moral and social norms regarding acceptable and desirable forms of consumption' (10)?

In the substance of this paper, I develop this outlandish proposition, asking the reader for a willing suspension (or at least a postponement) of their critical faculties. Developing some of the central concerns of literary geography, I explore how air travel works in the kinds of popular fictions that are labelled and often dismissed as 'airport novels.' These fictions are rarely analysed with any care, let alone shown any generosity, but I hope to show why they should be. Specifically, I use the thriller fiction of Lee Child and Daniel Silva as contrasting examples of character behaviour, with Silva's spy protagonist Gabriel Allon offered as a foil to Child's popular lone avenger Jack Reacher.[11] The substantive discussion that follows demonstrates the reliance of this kind of fiction on framing devices, assumptions, and to some extent on the social norms associated with air travel and aeromobility. I offer this reading of thriller fiction as a contribution to thinking about the intersection of mobility and transport infrastructure, narrative structure and fictional strategies, readers and their habits, and genre conventions.

But, and here I deviate from academic convention, I also calibrate the carbon cost of these series characters' plane travel, *as if* I were holding these fictional protagonists to account. I sketch out *an* argument for the potential influence of fiction on people's lifestyles, aiming to show how easy and straightforward it is to critique popular fiction for its lack of environmental awareness, if we are animated by 'ecological sustainability ideology' and armed with a naïvely literal approach to plot, character, and the relationship of fiction and social norms. To be clear: this is an illustration, not a seriously promoted argument. I want to present the idea that we should hold fictional people to account like this as no more than a bizarrerie. My sympathies lie, as will be clear, with those who are

sceptical about the impact of fiction on real life and actual behaviour, and suspicious of those who seek out good or bad messaging, particularly in the kinds of literature that most people actually read, most of the time. I raise what I hope isn't an entirely lonely cheer for popular fiction, even airport fiction, rather than nod along in approval of what is routinely promoted as progressive and improving.

My instinct is that the behaviour of fictional characters makes negligible direct difference to our personal behaviour, and certainly not at the scale and the urgent timeline of the climate crisis. The most we can say of the good or bad influence of fiction is that it is entirely unproven (this after hundreds of years of criticism). As Joshua Landy (2009: 75) puts it, 'the moralists have, after all, only shaky empirical evidence at hand to suggest that well-intentioned art actually makes any difference in people's behavior.' At best, it takes us in to the always interesting byways of why we read fiction and how we read character.[12] At worst, it recapitulates the moralistic criticism that the wrong kinds of reading by the wrong kind of readers have always attracted. In a time of crisis this is understandable, but it probably reflects more about ecocritics than about popular readers. Timothy Clark diagnoses the overinvestment in the power of pro-environmental cultural representations as no more than an 'ethical temptation,' neither solution nor salvation but a symptom of our current Anthropocene disorders.[13] By extension, this paper might in its modest way be seen as a kind of inoculation: I raise the prospect of what I call below (in jest!) 'low-carbon literary criticism' only to foreclose the possibility. It is a small step for didactic ecocriticism, particularly where the other readers of popular fiction are concerned, but it should be a step too far.[14]

Literary Criticism, with the Carbon Put Back In

Let me start then with the proposition that literature should be aware of its responsibilities in the age of climate crisis. As an extrapolation, as a knowing experiment in 'naïve' reading (Auyoung 2019), I will lay out the thesis that fictional characters, no less than real-world exemplars, set standards of behaviour and reinforce social norms that readers consciously or unconsciously emulate and endorse. I do so with as much vim and rigour as I can muster, though again I have to make it clear that this is *not* an argument I am actually promoting. This proposition is instead a kind of thought-experiment designed to explore the further reaches of what we think fiction does, and what ethical responsibilities we think it should then bear.

The central question is this: what influence do fictional characters have on people's actual behaviour? I do not want to review the sulky history of suspicion towards novels and their readers (particularly women, who always seem to bear the brunt of critical disdain: see Brantlinger 1982; Cohen 2007), save to note that moralists have in fact long worried about the bad influence of literary characters. The actions and the lifestyles of the fictive famous have routinely been condemned (even a tyro prosecuting counsel would put James Bond on the stand, for various sins, not all venial).[15] We should not leap to literature's defence and declare reading always and everywhere beneficial. Disparagement of fiction has been routinely met with overpraise from the *parti pris*, accusations of Quixotism and Bovaryism countered with Panglossian lists of its many advantages (the defence's character

witnesses would crowd a bench with literary critics and philosophers).[16] Apart from brain-training and other somatic benefits, the supposed advantages of consuming fiction include the enhancement of empathy and creativity, the promotion of inclusivity and open-mindedness, and so on. Such arguments tend to reproduce the familiar refrain that 'reading is good for you' (unsurprisingly trotted out by inveterate readers). Of making books there is no end, and there is no end too of special pleading on their behalf (Nehring 2004: 23). We must be allowed our doubts, most especially regarding the direction of causality. We are more likely to shape the consumption of fiction than that diet of fiction shapes us. 'We should all just come out and admit it', says Joshua Landy: *"morally improving" is merely a compliment we pay to works whose values agree with ours*' (Landy 2009: 70, emphasis in original).

Still, we shouldn't accept that fiction-writing and fiction-reading is environmentally neutral or negligible, its carbon cost nugatory. It might be that the consumption of stories is no different *in kind* from the consumption of commodities which come at a more obvious cost to the planet. Buying a book hardly compares to purchasing a SUV. But nothing comes from nothing, and even reading an e-book has a *potential* carbon cost. What if, for instance, readers are inspired to travel, either in the well-established business of literary tourism, or in the more general sense? We can call up in seconds websites devoted to literature-inspired tourism, including, ironically, at least one devoted to international travel inspired by Ian McEwan's work.[17] The carbon cost of international book tours and publicity events have not to my knowledge even been acknowledged by environmentally-minded critics.[18]

The charge might still strike us as unfair, given that fiction is sometimes taken as a *substitute* for real-world journeys. Novel-reading as armchair travel is surely an entirely environmentally responsible activity, and I have in mind Pierre Bayard's (2016) argument that the writer transports the reader to imaginary places quite different from the real places with which they arbitrarily share toponyms. However, this 'atopic criticism' powers temporal and spatial mobility, the movement to and from real and imaginary works, on more or less free energy lines – requiring nothing more than the firing of synapses in our rechargeable brains. The argument for fictional travel *replacing* real-world travel not only goes against the spirit of geocriticism, which addresses 'the issues associated with the aesthetic representations of space and places that are invested in the threshold that spreads out between the real and the fictional' (Westphal 2016: 4); it also disregards the possibility of efficacy, for good or bad. *What if* these movements and migrations between the imaginary and the real come at a cost that must be accounted for in actual energy budgets rather than in metaphysical matter transportation? If we accept this logic, then a negative kind of accounting might easily be proposed, set alongside the generally positive advocacy of cli-fi. So, to repeat: why should fiction be absolved of 'carbon guilt' (Garrard 2013: 177)? A few epiphanies from, say, climate-conscious literary fiction have to be set against the presumably poor example set by at least some *popular* novels. What price, for instance, not just the sexism/imperialism/racism, etc, of James Bond, but also his indefensible *globe-trotting*?[19] A related question might be suggested: when and where did the reading of fiction become a potential influence on the social norms associated with carbon-intensive lifestyles? The answer is surely: in the post-war age of affluence, when the lifestyles of the rich (always a fascination for the less well-off) start to become real possibilities in the

consumer democracies. The aspiration to own your own car, to own your own home, with all its mod cons, and, most importantly of all, the advent of cheap flights, so that the reader can not only travel in imagination but holiday abroad, see the sights, trot the world: bathed in 'the retrospective light of the Anthropocene' (Clark 2015: 52) these phenomena suggest that a low-carbon literary criticism is not only possible but necessary.

An obvious referent here would be that most derided of genres, the 'airport novel'. What actually makes a novel an airport novel is admittedly hard to capture, but I can find no better capsule definition than this entry in the Oxford *Dictionary of Euphemisms*: 'a book written for a person who does not read regularly. For the captive traveller market and considered by the literati to be unworthy of their attention' (Holder 2008: 79). Ignoring both kinds of snobbery on offer here, the emphasis on *reading whilst travelling* is crucial, and in this respect it is a surprise that while the airport novel has attracted fitful attention (see Leggett 2012), it is unconsidered by literary geographers, for all the interest in aeromobility (Adey 2008) and its infrastructure. The point is, of course, that such novels should be long enough and easy enough to read *on the move*, easy to put down and pick up your place in the story. From the nineteenth century onwards, these novels had a different name: *romans de gare* or *romans de fer*, depending on where you bought the novel or where you read them (see Platten 2010). In our day, the rise of the 'airport novel' announces the fact that the aeroplane and the airport (bad for the planet) have taken the place of the train (good for the planet).

There is, equally surprisingly, virtually nothing of substance on climate change and the politics of air travel, even in recent historical work on the correspondences between technologies of travel and literature (Dierikx 2008). This is evident in the cultural criticism on the airport novel, whose cues have been set by Marc Augé's (2009, originally 1992) argument about the airport as a 'nonplace' (see also Gottdiener 2001: 22). From this standpoint, airport fiction is defined only by its various inadequacies. Platten (2010) fixes on the airport novel as a place of refuge, a dose of *escapism* that keeps its pleasures securely 'airside': 'The rattling thriller imprisons readers in its imaginary world, and it does so by restoring to the language of literature its magical, transformative quality that takes them to a different place and leaves them there until the very last page' (275). Walter Nash, in *Language in Popular Fiction* (1990), singles out the *airport lounge* as the ideal setting for the undemanding escapism that genre novels provide: the tropes of supermodernity and hypermobility lead to the arresting image of readers *stuck in transit*, travelling vicariously and vacuously, whilst glued to benches in front of departure boards, reading dumb novels, going nowhere: 'They are designed to hook us in fast and speed us through delays and turbulence and that talkative irritant in the aisle seat. Your plane may not have left the runway, but at least you're already on page 149' (Brooks 2019: n.p.). Christopher Schaberg's (2018) sophisticated analysis of the textual life of air travel concentrates similarly on the immediate space/time of the airport, reworking these familiar readings of slow time and temporary imprisonment; and if he does raise the ecological significance of air travel, this is limited to the *representation* of nature in the airport itself. The airport is portrayed as a kind of 'ecology in waiting' (99), a 'natureculture' phenomenon not evacuated of nature but instead a 'harbinger of ecology', even a 'portal(s) for ecological awareness' (94, 101). But it is rather characteristic of this rather snooty subgenre of 'critical airport reading' that

there is not a single nod to the ecological costs of air travel itself. Schaberg is only interested in the 'ecologies' of matter and labour that subtend humans in flight, not the ecologies that flight produces. David Pascoe's (2011) *Airspaces* does consider the environmental costs of the *airport*, but the global crisis to which air travel contributes is lost in the leap from the material reality of airports to the all-encompassing but almost entirely abstract cultural phenomenon of 'airspace'; the *atmospheric* dimensions of 'airspace', and the vital mobility of spent jet fuel and greenhouse gases, are just absent. John D. Kasarda and Eric Lindsay (2011), writing barely a decade ago, even dismiss the notion that air travel should be restricted: there's no inkling of *flygskam* or flight shaming here; as a self-professed guide to 'the way we'll live next,' this is indefensible.

So let us sum up by asserting that the 'airport novel' lacks any serious ecological criticism. This leaves the way open, I think, to consider some examples of the contemporary airport novel, and the example their heroes set right now, in the midst of the climate crisis. I have chosen, for clarity and ease of exposition, two long-running series characters, from authors who are indelibly associated with the pleasures and pitfalls of airport fiction. What follows is an exploration of the place of air travel in their plotting and framing, combined with an accounting of the carbon costs of their protagonists' travels. The literary geographical analysis stands on its own as a detailed exploration of the mechanics of mobility in these novels, and I offer this entirely seriously as a contribution to popular fiction. But the carbon accounting should be read as a sort of satire on the more literal treatments of environmental responsibility. I leave it up to the reader to determine the calibration of absurdity involved, and if I have combined the legitimate and the illegitimate here, it is to provoke the reader to consider where the boundary should properly lie, the limits of fiction's influence.

A Fictional Carbon Footprint, Take 1: Gabriel Allon

Consider first the art restorer-cum-Israeli spy Gabriel Allon, protagonist of a score or more best-selling thrillers by the American novelist Daniel Silva (see Appendix A). Gabriel is a kind of straw man in this paper, and none of what follows is meant to be unduly critical of the well-researched and entirely entertaining books in which he appears. Nor is it quite fair, because we might reasonably expect *spy* novels to involve a fair amount of jet-setting cosmopolitan derring-do. Silva's novels do their day job admirably well, even if their bullish take on global geopolitics won't endear them to predominantly progressive-minded academia. Rather than take Silva to task for ideological failings, however, I want instead to underline the sheer amount of city-, country-, and continent-hopping that is his stock-in-trade as a novelist. Gabriel Allon's travel habits qualify him, as I will go on to show, for a carbon footprint that begins to rival that of many real-world celebrities.

For this reason alone, I would classify Daniel Silva's Gabriel Allon series as airport fiction. Transit is the series' modus operandi, and air travel its subtext. Airports are only occasionally a locale for encounter or exposition, to be sure, but all the familiar tropes of air travel are present. The flattened topography of the airport seems to extend to the peregrinations of his protagonists, their space/time signatures denoting a world of privilege, literally above the heads of the rest of us. At the same time come the regular

complaints of boredom and world-weariness that temper this seemingly desirable lifestyle. Silva repeats, on Gabriel's behalf, the dictum that the professional spy's life is one of alternating tedium and terror: a life of 'constant travel and mind-numbing boredom broken by interludes of sheer terror' (Silva 2015: 284). The travelling is all dull, the waiting interminable. Gabriel has to suffer 'stinking rail platforms' and 'moth-eaten transit hotels,' but it is the 'dreary airport lounges' (Silva 2008: 23) that sum up the ennui of international espionage. Gabriel has spent, 'by his own estimation, one-third of his career' in airports (Silva 2015: 80); he even jokes about offering his frequent flyer number (Silva 2005: 177), when unexpectedly rerouted by his Mossad masters. 'Like most Office [Mossad] agents, his career had been marked by near-constant travel, yet he had never mastered the ability to sleep on airplanes' (Silva 2010: 151), and in the characteristic bouts of introspection that follow, Gabriel muses that 'He was no one, he lived nowhere. He was the eternal wandering Jew' (Silva 2008: 74). The mark of this modern Cain is his boarding pass.

Airports do have a minor dramatic function in Silva's novels, most obviously and predictably through their 'perpetual proximity to crisis' (Schaberg 2018: 111). This is true not only because the paradigm of global security reminds us of our ever-present precarity in a world of unpredictable violence (Marquez 2019: 205). It is also because Gabriel's reasons for travel are precisely the need to keep the world, or at least his own country and people, as secure as possible. In the repetitive style that is both the charm and the curse of series fiction, something bad happens somewhere, sometimes to someone close to Gabriel, but often enough to anonymous and innocent civilians. Somebody, usually a past or present spymaster, fetches Gabriel from the shelter that high culture affords, and sets him on his deadly wandering.[20] There is often a protracted round of international consultations with spies from sympathetic but scheming foreign agencies (American, British, French, Swiss). Someone is usually recruited to go undercover, usually an attractive woman, often with riskily perfunctory preparation. Quite often, the best laid plans go awry. Sometimes, some sort of *deus ex machina* is needed to arrange for our heroes' release or salvation; or else, it is down to quick thinking, good training, and/or good fortune. The world ends up a safer place, albeit temporarily. Gabriel usually returns to his refuge, restoring artworks even if he cannot decisively restore the world.

All this involves, as one might imagine, a really impressive amount of flying. The various plots that Silva conjures up (Nazi war crimes, international art theft, the machinations of the Russian gangster state, Middle Eastern or far right terrorism, the past and present sins of the Catholic Church, various combinations of the above) are supertended by a skein of long- and short-haul flightpaths (Figure 1). Gabriel's unlikely double major – art restoration and assassination – means that he is constantly on the move, contrails in his wake. By my calculations (Table 2), I have Gabriel covering well over three quarters of a million kilometres, with 1100 hours in the air, over the course of the twenty years of his documented career, at a carbon cost of around 60 tonnes of CO^2.[21]

This is small beer when it comes to the business and entertainment elite examined by Stefan Gössling. Even at his worst, Gabriel is not even close to the world's premier-league offenders. Gabriel Allon would check in right at the lower end of the range illustrated by Gössling's celebrity cohort, most directly comparable with the actor (and environmental activist) Emma Watson (in 2017, 14 flights, 71 hours in the air, 15.1 tonnes

of CO^2). That said, there are difficulties in direct comparison, and my calculations are on the conservative side. Gössling uses the formula of 0.110kg CO^2 per pkm (passenger kilometre), or 33.8kg fuel per hour per passenger, and simply doubles this on the assumption that these celebrities fly business or first-class. The alternative formulae employed in this paper produces CO^2 figures around 66% lower. Moreover, Gabriel is routinely placed in coach by the parsimonious Mossad, so there is no need to inflate the figures, but my premium-class CO^2 calculations are still considerably lower than Gössling's simple 200% multiplier. For this reason, Gabriel Allon's carbon footprint is probably around half what it might be had Gössling carried out these calculations.

Gabriel Allon, producing around three tonnes of CO^2 per year by flying, still wouldn't rank next to the movers and shakers of the global celebrity world (… if he actually existed). But, compared to the global mean, which is around a flight every couple of years, he is an exceptional traveller. Even with the developed world as a baseline, an average of 11 or 12 flights a year takes Gabriel comfortably above the 10% of UK adults surveyed in 2014 who flew four or more times, with only 3% of these on long haul flights (see UK Department of Transport 2014). By any measure, Gabriel is a card-carrying 'citizen of Flyland' (Newport 2018: n.p.). With the advent of the Covid-19 crisis of 2020, Gabriel has even acquired his own private jet, 'a Gulfstream G550 of astounding comfort and murky registry' (Silva, 2021: 143). This is a luxurious necessity in a locked-down world, but then again private aviation is a notably inefficient use of jet fuel.

Now if we *assume*, as Gössling does, that celebrities influence us through their bad or good examples, then the kind of lifestyle that we read about in our bestsellers surely qualifies, at least in *theory*. We should remind ourselves that Gössling provides no evidence for the *actual* influence of influencers, besides the numbers of their social media followers, so we have at least the licence to speculate on how fictional travel affects our real-world travel. The argument about fiction's effects on our social norms is more intuitively obvious. Greg Garrard has made the point well:

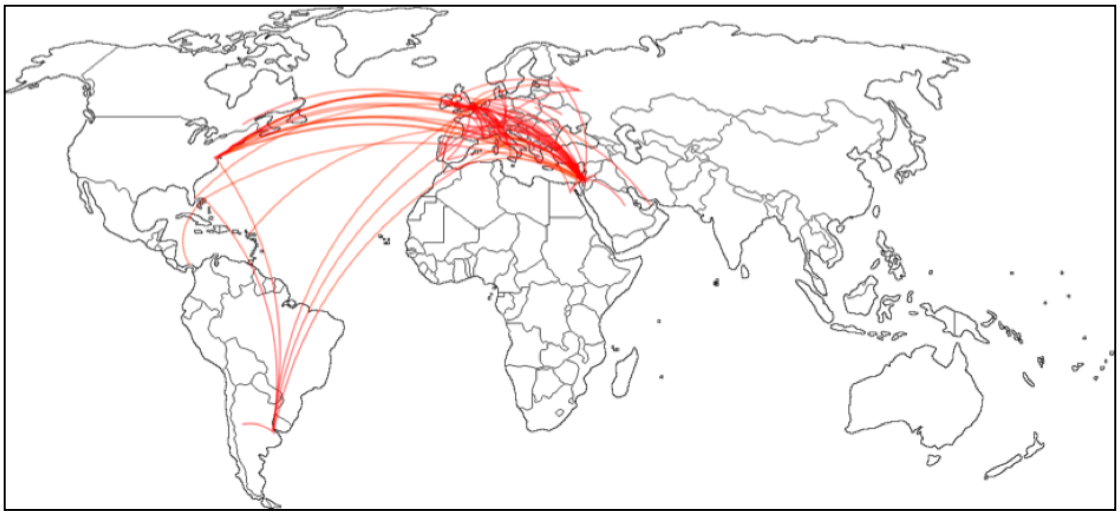

Figure 1. Flight paths: Gabriel Allon, 2000-21.

> Perhaps, though, literature can outflank the barriers to frank acknowledgement of climate risks. After all, its capacity to violate extant norms of emotion, distend norms of attention in time and space and challenge hegemonic repertoires of neutralisation and denial has long been central to the claims of politicised cultural criticism of all kinds. (Garrard 2013: 180)

Year	Number of flights	Total air miles (km)	Long haul (km)	Medium Haul (km)	Short haul (km)	Mean flight length (km)	Total flight time	pkg CO^2
2000-1	3	18220	14630	3590	0	6073	24 hrs 12 m	959
2001-2	10	12602	0	10630	1972	1260	20 hrs 19 m	1327
2002-3	3	2629	0	1270	1359	876	4 hrs 47 m	310
2003-4	12	46995	29100	17600	835	3916	64 hrs 18 m	3868
2004-5	9	11809	0	9370	2439	1312	19 hrs 12 m	1041
2005-6	19	85532	49940	34900	692	4501	116 hrs 0 m	6352
2006-7	11	34900	18590	13780	2530	3172	49 hrs 1 m	3601
2007-8	11	32332	15390	14650	2292	2939	45 hrs 43 m	2800
2008-9	15	43324	15360	24360	3604	2888	61 hrs 0 m	4219
2009-10	12	59096	46940	6910	2246	4674	75 hrs 36 m	3215
2010-11	11	59347	58560	0	787	5395	79 hrs 23 m	3588
2011-12	13	35555	16210	17580	1765	2807	50 hrs 3 m	2303
2012-13	17	33219	0	25920	7299	1954	49 hrs 10 m	2637
2013-14	11	40364	27340	8290	4734	3669	57hrs 50 m	2754
2014-15	11	11916	0	7880	4036	1083	18 hrs 42 m	1053
2015-16	10	51271	34740	16400	131	5127	68 hrs 48 m	2984
2016-17	10	41040	15390	25650	0	4014	53 hrs 2 m	2612
2017-18	22	60089	15390	40570	4129	2731	85 hrs 5 m	4324
2018-19	16	57426	33980	21890	1556	3589	74 hrs 54 m	3521
2019-20	3	5387	0	4704	683	1796	8 hrs 22 m	426
2020-21	11	56507	37612	18433	462	5137	76 hrs 11 m	4973
	240	***799560***	***429172***	***324377***	***43551***	***68913***	***1101hrs 38 m***	***58867***

Table 1. Gabriel Allon's air travel, 2000-2021

Garrard singles out Michael Crichton's fervidly reactionary 2004 thriller *State of Fear* for achieving precisely the opposite, contributing to the state of denial by having his characters criss-cross the world taking on eco-terrorists and climate science at the same time. Garrard cannot do better than repeat Myles Allen's pithy (2005: n.p.) summary of *State of Fear* as 'Viagra for climate skeptics.' We might add, using Gössling's helpful terminology, that Crichton is the authorial equivalent of a 'carbon boomer,' endorsing carbon-intense consumption such as air travel (Gössling 2019: 3). Daniel Silva's novels don't fall into this category. If we play the game of ranking real-life celebrities alongside fictional characters, however, we can place Gabriel Allon as something like a 'carbon philistine' – persons, that is, 'living highly energy intense lifestyles, while being communicatively indifferent to the global objective of climate change mitigation' (3). It is asking a lot for international spies to save the world and offset their carbon at the same time. But, as popular literature goes, this is as far from the kind of environmentally responsible intervention that Garrard espouses, without tipping into outright denial. Gabriel might not necessarily be a *bad* influencer, but he's certainly not a good one. There is in the Allon series perhaps even an indifference that verges on climate scepticism, though I am quick to say that things have changed over the years. Through his spy avatar, Silva tended to portray those concerned with global warming as hippies or hypocrites, and he places climate action on a par with other fashionable liberal shibboleths, such as animal rights, pro-Palestine activism, the legalisation of drugs, opposition to the War on Terror, and so on. Later Silva novels, particularly the most recent, are notably socially and environmentally progressive, however. By *The Cellist*, Silva's latest novel, Gabriel is a pronounced 'liberal' (Silva 2021: 400), and fully shares climate change concerns (190) – even as he criss-crosses the world in the comfy Gulfstream.

A Fictional Carbon Footprint, Take 2: Jack Reacher

Having rather hastily, and harshly, flight-shamed Gabriel Allon, we can now turn to Lee Child's Jack Reacher. The Reacher stories (see Appendix B) qualify as 'airport fiction' as readily as Silva's, if not more so. When airport novels are listed, there you will find Child's novels cited.[22] There is hardly a major airport (at least in the Anglophone world) where you can't buy one of the Reacher adventures from the departure lounges. Child himself is willing to enter the lists for what he calls 'airport books' (Penguin Books 2018).

As long-running series characters of the same vintage, Jack Reacher and Gabriel Allon are interesting comparisons. Reacher (b.1960) is a few years younger than Gabriel (b.1952), but otherwise their histories run remarkably parallel over the last couple of decades. There are some obvious differences between Allon and Reacher, though. For a start, Reacher is a hulking 6' 5", whilst Gabriel could very easily be played in some film adaptation by, say, Tom Cruise.[23] Easier to overlook, I note the seemingly trivial point of characterisation, that Gabriel hates and fears dogs and other animals, whereas Reacher approves of them on principle. This is not such an idle comparison, because Reacher is on record in support of animal welfare causes, albeit on the slightly tenuous basis that a friend

and PETA supporter was a 'smart' man (Child 2007: 75, 281). It's a stretch, but we might tentatively suggest that Reacher would not lightly brush off expert opinion on the scale of our environmental challenges.

If the reader is unwilling to follow me so far, there is the more solid evidence of Reacher's lifestyle. Jack Reacher is not a 'climate advocate,' let alone an activist, but we could consider him a 'low carbon performer,' at least by default. The tally is set out in Table 2 and Figure 2, where I have included all the air travel in the short stories as well as the novels, following the same principles outlined previously.

Now this record is not without a substantial share of international travel, and the flightpath maps suggest a frequent flier as bad as Silva's hero. I readily admit that in the few pages of a short story, Reacher is capable of racking up an alarming number of air miles. In 'The Fourth Man' (Child 2019a), Reacher manages to travel from the US to Australia for less than a day: enough time to dispatch some old Balkan adversaries, without whom the world is better off, but hardly commendable on environmental grounds. On the whole, however, Reacher spends a relatively limited time in the air, and more importantly he has become rather more environmentally responsible as the series has progressed. Since the turn of the millennium, Gabriel Allon has travelled by plane six times as far as Reacher, and put five times more CO^2 into the fictional atmosphere.

A lot of this is down to Reacher's employment status, or lack of it. Reacher, subsequent to his thirteen years as a military policeman, is an inveterate loner, preferring to supplement his military pension and personal inheritance with odd jobs, along with the side hustle of knight errantry that is the Child formula. The classic Reacher plots are essentially westerns: 'Jack-none-Reacher,' the Man with No Middle Name, rides into small-town America (albeit arriving on the Greyhound rather than on a horse) and proceeds to right all manner of wrongs. Reacher is occasionally pressed back into service, but largely he prefers to serve justice autonomously, guided by his own unerring moral code. Unlike the secret servant Gabriel Allon, Reacher is a true wanderer, a drifter by upbringing (the

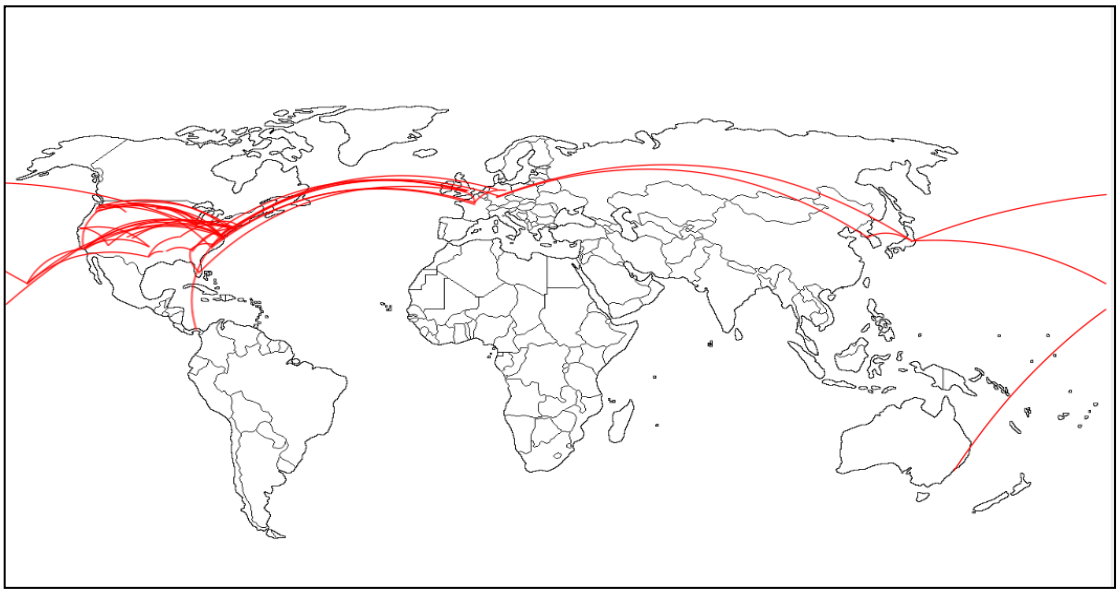

Figure 2. Flight paths: Jack Reacher, 1974-2020

Year	Number of flights	Total air miles (km)	Long haul (km)	Medium Haul (km)	Short haul (km)	Mean flight length (km)	Total flight time	pkg CO^2
1974	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
1977	4	15440	6130	9310	0	3860	20hr 32m	978
1986	1	21650	21650	0	0	7216	28hr 29m	1229
1989	2	6660	6660	0	0	3330	9hr 14m	488
1990	9	46957	38766	7340	851	5217	62hr 9m	3251
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
1996	5	39660	39660	0	0	7932	49hr 56m	2120
1997	2	2440	0	2440	0	1220	3hr 28m	258
1998	1	200	0	0	200	200	1hr 30m	50
1999	7	18654	14070	2640	1944	2664	23hr 16m	1395
2000	16	24766	0	21540	3226	1546	38hr 29m	2689
2001	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
2002	9	14090	0	13820	270	1566	21hr 0m	1669
2003	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
2005	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
2006	1	5540	5540	0	0	5540	7hr 24m	671
2007	2	1370	0	1340	30	685	2hr 27m	151
2008	1	200	0	0	200	200	1hr 15m	100
2009	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
2010	2	7080	0	7080	0	3540	9hr 9m	591
2014	8	33193	26020	6600	573	4149	42hr 38m	3817
2015	5	10290	0	10290	0	2058	14hr 2m	997
2016	1	5870	0	0	0	5870	7hr 27m	336
2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
2019	3	28180	24200	3980	0	9393	36hr 24m	1616
2020	0	0	0	0	0	0	0hr 0m	0
	79	***282240***	***182696***	***86380***	***7294***	***3573***	***378hr 49m***	***22403***

Table 2. Jack Reacher's air travel, 1974-2020

fifty different places of his childhood as an Army brat) and career (a hundred different places, including Germany, Belgium, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Kosovo, Panama, Colombia, and the Lebanon). 'Round and round the world' (Child 1998: 122) Reacher is sent: 'always where someone else told me to be' (Child 2004: 559).

By Reacher's late thirties, he has just had enough. It's not as if he disliked the Army and its peripatetic demands: quite the opposite. Reacher loves the military life, using precisely the same formula as Allon, minus the beef with the '*Long slow periods of nothing much, with occasional bursts of something*' (Child 2014: 157, emphasis in original). Reacher is not at all stultified by being constantly on the move, and movement is life itself rather than its interruption: 'Being static disconcerted him. He had moved around so much in its life it confused him to spend time in any one particular place' (Child 2000: 66). The downsizing of the 'big green machine' after 1989 (Child 2007: 164) is simply the greatest threat to the 'relentless forward motion' that is Reacher's 'organizing principle' (Child 2008: 19). So he quits.

From then on Reacher is constantly in motion, but he has no interest in *travel* in the tourist sense. He has no interest in the exotic and the far-flung, for their own sake: as he bluntly puts as early as *Die Trying*, "'I've seen overseas'" (Child 1998: 124). Reacher is drawn only to the homeland from which he has been exiled since birth. As he ruefully admits, early on: 'I'm like a tourist. Like I'm catching up' (124). He is catching up on *America*, the country he barely knows. In *Die Trying*, which is book 2, when Reacher is a few months shy of his 38th birthday, and only fourteen months out of the army, he is still relatively unfamiliar with the United States: 'he couldn't decode the subtle rhythms and feels and smells of America as well as he wanted to' (71). So he sets out on what comes to be an epic twenty-year journey, an odyssey of motels, diners, bus stops, and cloverleaf highway interchanges. These prosaic sites have more in common with Leopold Bloom than Ulysses, but quite apart from the fact that Joyce's everyman hero never decked his rivals with a lethal headbutt, Reacher has no real or symbolic Ithaca to reach for. The house he inherited from a friend and colleague he gives up, an anchor he doesn't want or need. Home then becomes 'a distant country he knew he would never visit. The journey there was too long to manage. The fare was too high. The sheer difficulty of insinuating himself into an alien lifestyle was impossibly great' (Child 1999: 463).

As an experiment in living, later as a lifestyle choice, later still as a kind of addiction, Reacher takes to life on the road that unspools in front of him like a black ribbon of Morse Code (Child 2005: 73). It is in one sense a return to his fugitive childhood (Child 2001: 239), but he at least gets to decide where he will be the next day, and the one after that. Travel is a constant, but Reacher travels as light as possible, with only his fold-up toothbrush (and in a grudging later concession foisted upon him after 9/11, his passport and an ATM card) for company. With these exceptions, he 'owned the things in his pockets and the clothes on his back and the shoes on his feet. That was all, and that was enough' (Child 2008: 18). He wanders the land, seeing the things he had never had time to see before, going here, going there, staying a night or two, and then moving on. The ethos is summed up in the story 'Everyone Talks': 'No bags, no schedule, no plan. Travel light, travel far' (Child 2017h: 325).

It's all quite majestically unlikely, but beautifully reasoned all the same. When challenged, which is often, Reacher is fond of saying that he has to be somewhere, but since he has 'no particular place to go, and all the time in the world to get there' (Child 2019b: 25), nobody else's order is ever imposed on his 'impossible freedom' (Child 1997: 28). He drifts around, in his own estimation, 'like a cheap tourist' (Child 1999: 8). But on reflection this is the very antithesis of tourism. Reacher is transparently content with small towns and out of the way places, the ordinary, the too-easily bypassed. He describes himself, in 'Too Much Time,' as 'Itinerant. Distributed. Transient. Episodic' (Child 2017b: 12). We might label him just as accurately as an *antitourist*:

> there were places to go, and there were things to do. There were cities, and there was countryside. There were mountains, and there were valleys. There were rivers. There were museums, and music, and motels, and clubs, and diners, and bars, and buses. There were battlefields and birthplaces, and legends, and roads. There was company if I wanted it, and there was solitude if I didn't. (Child 2011: 427)

Driven on by the 'hobo demon' (Child 2000: 132), Reacher always travels to the end of the line, wherever that might be. He seems for all the world like a psychogeographer, replacing tourist tracks with artificial lines of his own, all angles and whimsy:

> the irony of his life was that although he had covered most of the earth's surface, one time or another, he felt he hadn't seen much. A lifetime in the service was like rushing down a narrow corridor, eyes fixed firmly to the front. There was all kinds of enticing stuff off to the sides, which you rushed past and ignored. Now he wanted to take the side trips. He wanted a crazy zigzag, any direction he felt like, any old time he chose. (Child 2000: 208)

Most importantly, Reacher is no more attracted to flying than he is to cars. They are a means to an end, but with plenty to see on his own doorstep, he just doesn't need them. In *Gone Tomorrow* (2009), when his passport has expired, he doesn't rush to renew it. There *are* a few early temptations, naturally. In 1999's *Tripwire*, where the prospect of settled life is dangled before him, Reacher reflects on the attractions of premium flight cosseting. He 'had been flying since birth, first as a soldier's kid and then as a soldier himself, millions of miles in total, but all of them hunched in roaring spartan military transports or folded into hard civilian seats narrower than his shoulders. Travelling first class on a scheduled airline was a completely new luxury' (Child 1999: 398). But this is quickly discounted, as a lifestyle he cannot possibly justify. All subsequent blandishments are renounced: Reacher is not unappreciative of a good meal or a comfortable hotel, but a good cup of coffee will always count for more, and he is happy to put in a good word even for the likes of McDonalds. Reacher has no problem with flying, and occasional novels see him rack up some significant air miles, usually at the behest of the state, but they are relatively rare, and I like him all the more for not being a plaster saint. Far from pious, Reacher is perhaps most commendable for this total indifference to flying. The most telling moment in the entire Reacher oeuvre might just be found in the minor and otherwise far from essential short

story, 'Not a Drill.' Here, we catch Reacher looking up at the sky briefly before he directs his gaze to ground level:

> Overhead was a vast high bowl of summer sky, completely cloudless, unmarked except for wispy contrails eight miles up, from transatlantic jet planes heading to and from Europe, in and out of Boston and New York and Washington D.C. Great Circle routes, way up over Canada and Greenland, and then dropping down again to London and Paris and Rome. Straight lines on a spherical planet, but not on a flat paper map. (Child 2017i: 345)

This is a story about black flights and black sites, secret manoeuvres and geopolitical chicanery, and Reacher seems, *momentarily*, in contact with Gabriel Allon's high-stakes geopolitical brinkmanship. Allon might even be on one of these intercontinental flights. But after this reverie, Reacher's eyes return to the road before him, to the core Reacher *territory* of 'nowheresville' (Martin 2020: 18). Reacher increasingly avoids the 'destination' cities that are Gabriel's forte; Reacher simply opts out of their 'warped space' (Grossman 2012: 38), preferring the out-of-the-way places that are the transportation network's by-product.

Reacher's specialist subject is these *ordinary places*. Cities attract Reacher's interest not because they happen to be Paris or New York or Washington, or wherever, the kind of world traveller destinations to which Daniel Silva transports you, Tripadvisor-style, complete with recommendations for restaurants and signature dishes. For Reacher it is simply the singular and collective *city-ness* of cities that appeals: 'Cities are all different, but they're also all the same' (Child 2005: 165). Time and again Reacher comes back to the mundane appeal of the various combinations and recombinations of 'Geography, and architecture' (Child 2008: 378). He is also, wholly pleasingly, curiously attentive to the local, like the streets in the seemingly nondescript mid-west town of Mother's Rest (Child 2015: 24): 'The town explained itself to him, gradually, street by street.' 'He knew cities' (Child 2019b: 73), it is acknowledged in a late novel, and he is the one fictional character who could make this grand claim without embarrassment, after twenty years on the road in search of America: 'Reacher had seen all kinds of cities, all across America, east, west, north, south, all kinds of sizes and ages and current conditions. He knew their rhythms and their grammars. He knew the history baked into their bricks' (Child 2019b: 17). In fact, there's just such a lot of *geography* to like in the Reacher novels, even when you don't know precisely where the action is set. Child himself has written of the need 'to take geography into account, even if he was being deliberately hazy,' in order to construct a 'plausible geography' (Martin 2020: 137). Reacher himself has a fondness for maps and extols the skill of map reading like a model Geography ambassador. But, above all, it is Reacher's practised appreciation for the ordinary that appeals. I can't think right now of any other fictional creation, literary or otherwise, with his feet on the ground like this.

So: I come not to berate Reacher but to praise him. As far as travel goes, Reacher sets a pretty decent example, most particularly in his been-there, done-that attitude to anything resembling tourism. His creator has said that 'He can be anywhere and do anything' (Liang 2017: n.p.). But in fact Reacher doesn't travel that far, in global terms. He

certainly doesn't want, doesn't need, to travel in order to validate himself, still less to rush to Instagram to prove that he has been there. I'd add that he doesn't have a home, doesn't drive, uses minimal resources, has no children. He's no 'ecocelebrity,' and his environmental record is far from perfect (few among us could say different), but it's not a bad example, all told.

Conclusions

With tongue still firmly in cheek, then, I'm offering Jack Reacher as an exemplary citizen, for his attraction to the ordinary at hand, his indifference to planes and cars, and for that matter to houses and property and progeny. He's a big guy, but his carbon footprint is pretty commendable.

But in finding lots to admire, not only in Lee Child's work, but also in that of his creation Jack Reacher, am I not doing precisely the same thing as I have been mocking? After all, and it's hardly a spoiler, Reacher doesn't exist. What then is the point of praising him? Isn't this as moralising a move as any made by the enthusiasts of ERB? With respect, the answer is *no*. The existence or otherwise of fictional characters has long been debated, and there is no need to go into the philosophical implications here. The most pertinent point is that no-one bar the most puritan of critics would deny that stories engage us, and that admiring or despising literary characters is one of the enduring satisfactions of fiction. Moreover, fictional characters outlive their authors, migrate across media, attract fans and fandom, reflect but also refract social reality. There is really nothing weird about writing about characters *as if* they exist; it would be unbearably tedious to speak only of character functions and effects.[24] But there is a world of difference between taking characters seriously and suggesting that their behaviour influences our own, at least in simple and straightforward ways. My *jeu d'esprit* of taking Jack Reacher as an example of responsible behaviour is not the same as suggesting that reading Reacher, or any other fiction, makes us better environmental citizens as a direct result. It may follow the 'founding intellectual tenet of ecocriticism' (Clark 2015: 18), but the suggestion that fictional narratives, polite or pulpy, have any kind of primacy in improving mores is a hopelessly heroic notion.

Instead, I offer these observations on the framing of air travel in the Reacher and Gabriel Allon series as a contribution towards understanding the literary geography of popular thrillers like these, the kind of thing that gets dismissed as 'airport fiction,' and thus wholly ignored. This is peculiar: so much has been written about the city and its connection to crime fiction (see for instance Howell 1998), but the role of aeromobility in relation to these kinds of *thrillers* has generated hardly any attention. Literary geography is well-placed to consider these themes. I hope in a small way to indicate how this might be done, and how we might say something substantial about the affinities between air travel and thriller fiction, hoping also that the plane might grab some of the attention that has gone to other forms of transportation.[25] Some of this is straightforward. Obviously, globe-trotting spies rely on the infrastructure of international travel; the plots in which they are enmeshed depend on it. Only marginally less surprising is the invocation of both the pleasures of air travel (the exotic locales and lifestyles) and its accompanying tedium. Beyond this, however, the telling correspondences between technology and the reader's

experience is worth further exploration, and we should not dismiss such writing as merely easily consumed in transit, or else looking for a functional *explanans* that militates against serious or discriminating critical attention. I am thinking here of the ways in which a literary geography of air travel might develop the focus of Jonathan Grossman's discussion of the transport revolution of the nineteenth century, specifically 'The way the passenger transportation system networks people, warps space and time, and transforms the art of the novel, which provides a means for its comprehension' (Grossman 2012: 5). Grossman's exemplar is Dickens, and we should make the effort to remember that Dickens was above all a *popular* novelist: I also point in this paper to the ways in which the *better* writers can play with the tropes of international travel and tourism in order consciously to subvert them.

If I have taken the further step of carefully calibrating the carbon costs of fictional travel, I hope only to raise questions about what we think these novels do, what effect they have, besides pass the time and please us. My intent here is somewhat sarcastic of the kind of enthusiasm that the ecocritically-minded have expressed, this chilly vision of an environmentally responsible literature. I've tried to argue against the grain of unsubstantiated claims for fiction's efficacy, which at best border on being idealistic platitudes of the motherhood and apple pie variety. What *is* really disturbing, in the thought-experiment I've floated, is the idea that we might need better-behaved fictional characters, and rather fewer badly-behaved ones.

Holding people who don't exist to account is pretty routine, and we are none the better for such policing. Child's pusillanimous Swedish publishers apparently objected to the series' high body count (Martin 2019: 158), perhaps fearful of Reacher's impact on their country's enviably low homicide rates. Hopefully, flight shaming fictional characters is too far even for the most energetically ethical critic. I would like to forestall the possibility of a kind of criticism that takes itself too seriously, and the power of fiction too literally.[26] It may be that fiction doesn't really matter, in these existential circumstances: whether novels have a progressive theme or if they simply deliver cheap thrills. And if they don't matter, or not much, it seems silly to single out the popular thriller for mindless distraction from the tasks at hand. And if they do matter, albeit marginally, we might reflect with a bit more thought, and more generosity, on why and how they can be expected to make a difference. We can't simply praise literary cli-fi (say) as a putatively good influence and condemn the likes of airport fiction as a bad one. In short, I'd retain the right to read irresponsibly, and bat the ball back into the court of those who make great grand claims for the power of stories.

Acknowledgements

This was a paper written in lockdown conditions, and the irony is certainly not lost on me. It's been a lengthy process turning this enforced necessity/*jeu d'esprit* into an acceptable paper, and I'd like to thank Alex Beaumont and Sheila Hones for their great patience, even when I was a bit grumpy. I would also like to thank the four reviewers who considered this paper in its different forms, even if I haven't taken up all of their suggestions, and even if

my purpose in writing the paper was unclear, which is my fault. This was never ever intended as a spoof, and certainly not a hoax, but I've been playful in the presentation, and it didn't always come across. Finally, I'd like to thank the people who read various versions of this argument, and who gave me the encouragement to persevere. A particular shout out to Alex Govan and George Worrall who clearly qualify in my estimation as 'good' readers – for (a) humouring me, (b) without any duress, asking to read the draft, and (c) claiming that they'd enjoyed it, though this may take us back to (a).

Notes

[1] In this paragraph, I have run together reading, literature, fiction, and stories/narratives merely for the sake of avoiding the repetition of 'literary and popular fiction'. In this paper, I am interested in fictional narratives, rather than, say, news media, documentaries, or nonfiction.

[2] Here, I disagree with Timothy Clark's suggestion that ecocritical arguments for the efficacy of cultural criticism are distinguished by 'not-quite-full seriousness' (Clark 2015: 196).

[3] Here is a similar statement from Casper Bruun Jensen (2020: 152), conceding in one sentence but repeating the claims for significance in the other: 'Cli-fi, of course, cannot rescue us. It can, however, help us to speculatively sharpen the stakes and imagine the range of possible consequences and responses.'

[4] All education is by definition didactic, but statements like this make me glad that my schooldays are long behind me.

[5] This suggestion does not seem so outlandish given the attention increasingly given to the power of representation, and the inequities inherent in the production and dissemination of stories. There is no space here to cover these issues adequately, but I'm thinking here not just of contemporary anxieties about racism and sexism (in particular), but also of the academic analysis (usually with mass and social media in mind) of 'mediated fiction' and 'usable stories.'

[6] It's obviously an exaggeration to say that I'd welcome the end of the world as an alternative to reading *Solar* again.

[7] These suggestions cannot of course leave such stories to 'speak for themselves' and the hovering attention of informed educators is recommended: 'Readers will not automatically become environmentally educated by the fiction available, which has a mix of motives and messages […] a young reader may need some help to disagree with a story's omniscient and persuasive narrational voice' (Biggar and Webb 2010: 410-11).

[8] Of course, it is not a 'free' market, even with the rise of self-publishing, let alone equitable. But that is another story.

[9] Merve Emre (2017) argues that 'good' and 'bad' readers are the products of social, cultural, and political milieux, and their construction ought to be the object of our studies, rather than an initial assumption that we import as a substitute for effective criticism.

[10] UK readers will recognise this as the endlessly-reiterated tagline for the country's largest supermarket chain, a company frequently accused of greenwashing.

[11] 'A righteous avenger for our troubled times' is a paperback strapline for the Reacher stories.

[12] There is no better guide here than Vermeule (2010).

[13] 'Anthropocene disorder is coined to name a lack of proportionality, not out of a sense of old norms of consideration and demarcation calling to be restored, but of a loss of proportion *tout court*, vertiginously and as yet without any clear alternative' (Clark 2015: 147).

[14] I want to show how easy it is to illustrate a thesis that is at best inadequate and at worst perverse. The fact that three reviewers of earlier drafts urged me to make the case for a low-carbon literary criticism stronger surely proves my point. I am trying here to provoke a discussion about the limits of fictional influence and the nature of fictional responsibility in our serious times. The wider argument is that we might take a moment to ask questions about what, in the climate emergency, we expect fiction to be and to do.

[15] See Child, B. (2018). The granddaddy of such critiques, Bennett (1983), is by comparison far more subtle and engaging.

[16] Most prominently, the critic Wayne Booth, and the philosophers Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty.

[17] See https://travelsofadam.com/2012/05/ian-mcewan-books-for-travel-inspiration/, last accessed 17 August 2021.

[18] In this regard, Lee Child is not a great exemplar. Daniel Silva's research trips must also be pretty effective in racking up the air miles.

[19] Read, and thoroughly disapprove of, https://luxeadventuretraveler.com/how-to-travel-like-james-bond/, last accessed 17 August 2021.

[20] In the later novels Gabriel has risen through the ranks to spymaster himself.

[21] It's a surprise to me how interested several reviewers were in the methodology, but these figures have been carefully arrived at even though my intent is satirical. These calculations of air travel and carbon consumption have been made by charting the journeys described or required by the movements of the principal character, noting distance travelled, nature of transport (private plane, commercial flight, premium or economy class). In some instances, nearest likely airport has been used for my estimates. All calculations available from the author. I have used the United Airlines definitions: short haul = less than 700 miles/1100km; medium = 700-3000miles/1100-4800km; long haul = over 3000 miles/4800km. Distances have been calculated using http://www.webflyer.com/travel/mileage_calculator/, flight times using https://www.travelmath.com/flying-time, and carbon emissions using https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Carbonoffset/Pages/default.aspx. These websites have last been accessed 17 August 2021. Flights have been calculated using economy class unless there is textual evidence to believe otherwise. I have used first class/premium for private aircraft trips. For helicopters, I have made calculations of roughly 11 kg CO_2 per 100pkm. For small aircraft, roughly 150kph, and 75kg CO_2 per hour. For turboprops, roughly 500kph, and 90kg CO_2 per hour. The chronology of the Allon books, unlike Reacher, is typically precise,

and most of the action is placed in the year before the year of publication, which explains my first column. All data and calculations available from the author by request.

[22] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airport_novel#Writers_of_airport_novels, last accessed 17 August 2021.

[23] To explain: quite a few of Reacher's 100 million readers reacted with astonishment that the film versions starred the 5'7"/1.7m actor.

[24] The 'how many children had Lady Macbeth?' question, a literal dunderheadedness wrongly identified with A.C. Bradley, has been routinely scoffed at for nearly a hundred years. It became a founding gesture in literary criticism: 'Theorists have long fashioned themselves as crusaders against the pleasures and dangers of literary absorption, reacting suspiciously to the ordinary pleasures people take in literary characters, replying to fiction's barbaric yawp with a stentorian no!' (Vermeule 2010: 16). But there is no need to be so pious, as shown by work on the cultural afterlife of character, on fans and fan communities, and above all on cognitive approaches to literature.

[25] One relatively recent standout is Jonathan Grossman's brilliant (2012) exploration of the mid-nineteenth century British road and rail transportation network, but this can be supplemented by Livesey (2016).

[26] Perhaps all novels are 'a practically pointless protest against the fate of the universe' (Martin 2020: 98).

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Appendix A: Gabriel Allon novels by Daniel Silva

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Appendix B: Jack Reacher books and short stories by Lee Child

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