# A beautiful and devilish thing: Children's picture books and the 1914 Christmas Truce

## Abstract

For over half a century, the 'imagining' of the Great War in the United Kingdom has been framed by the existence of two Western Fronts, one literary and the other historical. The authors and illustrators of children's picture books, whose work has traditionally reflected a society's values and pre-occupations, have remained remarkably faithful to the literary construct of the war as a futile and meaningless conflict that destroyed a generation. This article will analyse four children's picture books dealing with the Christmas Truce of 1914, which has become an historical touchstone for adherents of the literary imagining. Using methods grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), visual grammar, and art theory the authors explore how text and image combine to create moving and insightful morality tales that use the particularities of an historical event to communicate a vision of humanity rather than a work of historical scholarship.

## Introduction

In 2014 the British supermarket chain Sainsbury's released a short film about the 1914 Christmas Truce as part of its Christmas advertising campaign. The *Guardian* (Fogg, 2014) criticised it as "disrespectful", "tasteless", "dangerous" and "crass". What particularly disturbed the Guardian writer was that Sainsbury's did something to the Great War "which is perhaps the most dangerous and disrespectful act of all: they have made it beautiful" (Fogg, 2014, para. 8). This rendering of the Western Front was at odds with the 'reality' of trench warfare as it was communicated by poets and writers such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Erich Maria Remarque. In this case, people were not averse to myths, they just needed to be the 'correct ones'. As Reynolds (2014) observes, for half a century the correct imagining of the Great War in Britain has been framed by the existence of two Western Fronts, one literary and the other historical. The literary imagining of the war is of a "meaningless, futile bloodbath in the mud of Flanders and Picardy – a tragedy of young men whose lives were cut off in their prime for no evident purpose" (Reynolds, 2014, p. 406). Despite being challenged by any number of respected historians (Bond, 2002; Ferguson, 1999; Gregory, 2014; Sheffield, 2002; Todman, 2005; Winter, 1988) it is the literary rather

than the historical Western Front that exerts the greater influence on the wider understanding of the war.

It is hardly surprising that children's picture book authors and illustrators are fervent devotees of the literary Western Front. As they are usually chosen by parents or family members, picture books are an important indicator of contemporary attitudes and morals (Flothow, 2007, p. 157) and often reveal what parents and teachers desire for children (Avery, 1989, p. 95). As they are integral to a child's early exposure to literature, they are a powerful ideological tool, one capable of making an unchallenged contribution to social and political discourse (Kerby, Baguley and MacDonald, 2019). When picture books deal with historical events which have helped to create and maintain racial, ethnic, regional and national identities, such as major wars, they can make an often underestimated contribution to what Hazard (1983) characterises as a "national soul" (p. 111). This article will explore the engagement with the literary Western Front and an event that has come to symbolise its major tenets through an analysis of the text and images of the following four books: *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914* (Hendrix, 2014), *And the Soldiers Sang* (Lewis and Kelley, 2011), *The Christmas Truce* (Duffy and Roberts, 2014), and *The Christmas Truce: The Place Where Peace Was Found* (Robinson and Impey, 2014).

These books offer what Chouliaraki (2013) characterises as a "communication of war as an imaginary" or a "structured configuration of representational practices, which produces specific performances of the battlefield at specific moments in time" (p. 318). These representations are not offered merely to inform and persuade the reader, but also to "cultivate longer-term dispositions towards the visions of humanity that each war comes to defend" (p. 318). The authors and illustrators are then able to transcend the limits imposed by their chosen historical setting and help construct myths through which readers can make sense of their lives. MacCallum-Stewart (2007) describes this phenomenon as the "parable of war", one that is an "an emotive, literary retelling of the war" (pp. 177-178). In conforming to the modern imagining of the war, these children's authors and illustrators have chosen the specific moment of time during which the unofficial and illicit Christmas Truce of 1914 occurred. Each of the books seeks to contrast the horror of trench warfare on the Western Front with the outdated notion of chivalry between enemies during wartime, which was never repeated, but which showed that however briefly, "beneath the brutal clash of weapons, the soldiers' essential humanity endured" (Steenard, 2018, para. 8).  At times, like Sainsbury's, the authors and illustrators have found beauty amidst the mud and barbed wire. It is a vision, however that is not without cost. Each of the four texts is beautifully written and illustrated and offer a consistently moving and insightful exploration of a contemporary imagining of the war. Readers see a world with which they are familiar, yet the British and German infantry who crossed No Man's Land on Christmas Day 1914 might not recognise themselves, for theirs was the historical rather than the literary Western Front.

## Historical Background

The Christmas Truce was always going to attract the attention of children's authors and illustrators either side of its centenary. Since the 1960s it has enjoyed a "cherished position in public memory", having been "repackaged and repurposed by historians and others who were

determined to advance a certain view of the war" (Crocker, 2015, p. 6). The accepted narrative is that on Christmas Day in 1914 soldiers from both sides, trapped in a futile war and feeling more empathy and compassion for the men they fought than their own generals and politicians, met in No Man's Land. There they exchanged gifts, played football, observed a truce (for which they were later punished), and in some cases refused to fire on each other when the truce ended. For authors and illustrators, the truce offers a range of inducements, not the least being the widespread, though exaggerated belief that this "moment of sanity in the midst of the brutal and senseless lunacy" was a "soldier's rebellion against the tragic waste of war and the stupidity of … the politicians and generals". In reality, however, its causes were far more prosaic: "rain, mud, curiosity, lack of personal animosity toward the enemy, and homesickness" (Crocker, 2015, p. 4).

Having been reshaped for modern audiences, the truce has remained a "historiographical touchstone for the conventional narrative of the First World War and an enticing shorthand for the view that the conflict was futile and senseless" (Crocker, 2015, p. 19). It was not, as one of the more romantic historians of the period believes, "the only meaningful episode in the apocalypse" (Weintraub, 2001, p. xvi). At best, it was a "light where no light might have been" (Brown and Seaton, 1984, p. 216), yet both the exaggerated and more moderate views fit seamlessly into the world of children's picture books. Both allow the authors and illustrators to find beauty in the Western Front and in human nature, the perfect foils for the horror and futility that is central to the widespread imagining of the conflict. This imagining is strengthened by the strong cultural attachment to Christmas as a celebration of virtue and of the possibilities it offers for spiritual and moral redemption.

## Approach

The four children's picture books explored in this article will be broadly analysed using methods grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) devised by Michael Halliday (1978) for analysing verbal and visual texts. This includes Myskow's Levels of Evaluation Framework (2018b), informed by the work of Martin and White (2005) and Hunston (2000; 2011) which will inform the discussion of the text. Painter, Martin and Unsworth's (2013) *Reading Visual Narratives* which builds upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design* will be used to discuss the semiotics of the images. Visual theory in relation to design elements and principles will also be incorporated as part of the analysis of the images which is particularly important given that they have been created by professional artists who bring their own voice to the respective stories.

## Levels of Evaluation

The central tenet of SFL is that language is a part of the system of society and that any act of communication involves choices. Halliday proposed that there are three metafunctions of language: Interpersonal, Ideational and Textual. Myskow's Levels of Evaluation framework is sensitive to the specific features of historical discourse (2018b). Myskow (2019) has modified the existing Appraisal tools to highlight the key evaluative aspects of history texts: significance, fortune, and status. It draws on the semantic categories outlined in Martin and White's Appraisal framework which include positive/negative loadings of Appreciation,

Affect (Dis/Satisfaction, Un/Happiness, In/Security, Dis/Inclination), and Judgement, (Social Esteem: Normality, Capacity, Tenacity; Social Sanction: Veracity, Propriety). Myskow (2018b) elaborated the subcategory of Normality to account for two types of Normality, which include the subcategories of Judgement (Fortune (un/lucky) and Status (strange/popular). These subcategories are particularly relevant for evaluations of historical discourse, for example, identifying with a soldier who could be an "ill-fated victim of circumstance" (negative, symbolised as [-ve] Fortune) (Myskow, 2018b, p. 343).

The Levels of Evaluation framework focuses on the interpersonal metafunction, which is central in children's picture book stories (Painter, et al., 2013). The interpersonal metafunction facilitates an analysis of evaluative language framed by three evaluative acts: Inter-evaluative, Super-evaluative and Extra-evaluative. These acts are not distinct or autonomous but are dynamically interactive and collectively communicate the evaluative positioning taken up in the text. The dynamic interaction that occurs among the levels is described as "evaluative resonance", in which "attitudinal realization by a participant at one level of the framework may resonate at other levels, invoking evaluations by other discourse participants" (Myskow, 2018b, p. 340). Through this approach, meaning is explored through the text, rather than by "inferences about the inner cognitive work of the authors by what the text 'really means'" (Myskow, 2018, p. 340). The inter-evaluative act (those performed by historical actors) is evidenced through the perspectives provided by the represented participants, the super evaluative (by the authorial voice), and extra evaluative (voices concerned with disciplinary engagement) which are concerned with the discipline of history itself. In addition, there is a fourth level, meta-evaluation (how the discourse itself is evaluated), informed by Hunston's (2000, 2011) Status, Value and Relevance (SVR) model, which explores whether the text exhibits features associated with a "good work of history" (Myskow, 2018, p. 33). This is particularly important for children's picture books that purport to be factually or historically 'authentic'.

In addition, Myskow (2018a) contends that it is possible to view evaluative acts depicted in visual images. He argues that this is sanctioned by the authorial voice through the voices that are presented at the Super-evaluative level of the verbal text. Therefore, an analysis of images at the Super-evaluative level is considered in conjunction with evaluations at the Inter-evaluative level (by the historical participants) are seen "as in line with the views being advanced throughout the text as a whole" (p. 39). The attitudinal meanings in images at the Inter- and Extra-evaluative levels which resonate at the Super-evaluative level, therefore collaborate with the verbal text "to advance particular views of the past" (p. 40). Jewitt (2009, p. 15) posits that "the meanings in any mode are always interwoven with the meanings made with those of all other modes co-present and co-operating in the communicative event", which in the case of children's picture books also includes the visual mode. This is of particular importance as visual sources "may reveal new and sometimes ignored meanings" (Zohrabi, et al., 2019, p. 40).

**Reading Visual Images**

The discussion of the images in the four children's picture books will be further informed by Painter, Martin and Unsworth's (2013) *Reading Visual Narratives*, which extends the work of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design.* Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) claim that visual language is not transparent and universally understood, but is "culturally specific" (p. 4). To understand the images in the four children's picture books as being "connected with the verbal text, but in no way dependent on it" (p. 18), requires consideration of the contemporary context in which they were created which is a re-imagining of the war on which they are based, rather than the historical specifics of the Truce itself. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) developed the categories informed by the SFL approach using Interpersonal (Interaction and modality), Ideational (Representational), and Textual (Composition). This work has been further extended by Painter, et al., (2013) who have also used the Interpersonal, Ideational and Textual categories. Table 1 below provides an overview of the elements identified by Kress and Van Leeuwen and extended on by Painter et al., (2013).

Table 1: Approaches to visual images explored by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Painter et al., (2013)

| **Kress and van Leeuwen – *Visual Grammar* (2006)** | **Interpersonal** (Interaction and modality) Social distance (size of frame, close up etc., Involvement and Power; Contact and Modality | **Ideational** (Representation) Codification of ideological positioning: narrative – vectors (depiction of action or movement); conceptual – static (pause or reflective moment) | **Textual** (Composition) Spatial disposition and display of images: information value, salience, framing) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Painter, Martin and Unsworth – *Reading Visual Narratives* (2013)** | **Interpersonal**: Focalisation: Pathos and Affect; Ambience (vibrancy, warmth, familiarity), and Graduation | **Ideational** Participants: Character manifestation, Character appearance and Character relations; Processes: Inter-event relations; and Inter-circumstances. | **Textual** Intermodal Integration: Layout; Framing and Focus. |

Within SFL approaches there are sets of choices within each of the three metafunctions depicted through 'system networks'. These provide a diagrammatic representation of the meaning choices used within the semiotic resources being explored. The system itself is conventionally written in small capitals. Choices within the system are written in square brackets, e.g. [+gaze]. Painter et al., (2013a, p. 9) characterise a picture book as a text that "instantiates meaning from the semiotics systems of both language and image". Using that understanding, they further developed the systems within the following three metafunctions for analysing picture books.

The Interpersonal or Interactive metafunction refers to the social relationships between the participants, the evaluative orientations they have towards each other and the world they exist in. Painter et al., (2013) build upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) argument for a distinction between the contact made between a represented character and a viewer. Painter et al., (2013) utilise the system of FOCALISATION using the two features [contact] – engaging with the represented character via eye contact (+gaze) and [observe] – where the character does not make eye contact (-gaze). Additional visual choices can include seeing something through the eyes of the character [mediated], as opposed to the [unmediated] option where

the reader can observe or make contact without being positioned as a character. The system of PATHOS considers how the images present a character's emotions (affect) and is dependent on facial features as well as bodily stance and gestures. The key features used to portray characters in the PATHOS system are [engaging] which offers three choices of appreciative (minimalist style), empathic (generic style) and personalising (naturalistic style). The opposite feature is [alienating] which describes hyper-real contrasts and a caricature style. The system of AMBIENCE is the creation of atmosphere or mood, through the use of colour and light. This includes the two choices of [ambient] image or [non-ambient] outline drawing. The three core systems within ambience are VIBRANCY (colour saturation), WARMTH (use of warmer colours) and FAMILIARITY (colour differentiation). The system of VISUAL GRADUATION is linked to the features of [force] and [scaling]. Force can be represented through quantification [number] (high or low number of same item), [mass/amount] (large or small scale relative to other comparable elements) or [extent] (taking up a larger or smaller amount of available space.

The Ideational or Representational metafunction considers the ways images represent the relationships between the represented participants and is divided into narrative and conceptual representation. Both Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Painter et al., (2013) agree that narrative processes encompass unfolding actions and events and connect represented participants in images by vectors which are created by people or elements in the image itself. Narrative processes always have vectors, however conceptual representations do not. Conceptual processes are static and represent the ideas in images, inviting the viewer to consider, inter alia, the significance of what is being portrayed. This can be enhanced through the inclusion of symbolic attributes. In the dimension of representational meaning there can also be interactive participants, those who both produce the text and images and those who read and view them (Ly, et al., 2015). Using the systems of CHARACTER MANIFESTATION Painter et al., (2013) determine that a character can manifest within a story as a [complete] figure or as a [metonymic] one, represented through a body part or shadow/silhouette. The system of CHARACTER APPEARANCE shows how characters can [appear] in the first depiction in the story and then [reappear] 'immediately' in the next image or 'later' in the events which unfold. Variations can occur with characters emerging and receding into the background in relation to previous images, and also increasing or decreasing details such as clothes, accessories or symbolic attributes. Relationships between characters [CHARACTER RELATIONS] uses the features of [co-classification], in which the characters have similar attributes, such as size and orientation or through [comparison: attributive] in which attributes or accessories of two characters are compared and presented, or through [comparison: configurational] in which comparison is invited by the similar shape or contours of two characters or groups. Character relations can also be represented through [comparison: concurrent] in which comparison is available in single or adjacent images and also through [comparison: retrospective] through which comparison occurs from a different point in the story.

Painter et al., (2013) argue that in addition to the images we also use our real-world knowledge to interpret what the represented participants are doing. Painter et al., (2013) describe this process as INTER-EVENT relations with a sequence of images described as either [unfolding], which describes the time passing in the narrative with the choices of [succession]

(characters appearing in successive images) or [simultaneity] (actions involving different characters). Another feature is [projection] where a character is depicted thinking about something [real] and then the reader sees what they were thinking about in the next image [imagined]. The consideration of the degree of circumstantial detail provided in the image is considered under the system INTER-CIRCUMSTANCE. This can occur when details from the setting in successive images remains the same [sustain degree], maintained with small differences [maintain context], has been removed [decontextualise], or detail is added [recontextualise] from the previous image. The degree of circumstantiation available can change through framing and cropping participants, reducing or adding detail or using a different perspective.

The Textual or Compositional metafunction is related to how all the elements work together, particularly the representational and interactive dimensions. Painter et al., use the system INTERMODAL INTEGRATION to identify the type of layout that has been used in the image either [integrated] where the text or verbiage is incorporated as part of the visual image or [complementary] where the verbiage and image are in distinct spaces within the layout. The [complementary] option includes three choices: Axis [facing/descending], Weight [image privileged/equal/verbiage privileged], and Placement [adjacent/interpolating]. The way images are presented on the page is explored through the system of FRAMING with the two major choices of [bound] which consists of a margin with a number of choices, including whether the image breaks the edge [breaching] and [unbound] where the image fills out the entire page to the edges [contextualised] or the image is placed on a white space background [decontextualized]. The final system choice in this metafunction is FOCUS which looks at the composition of different visual elements and how they are positioned to direct the viewer's attention. The FOCUS network consists of two main choices [centrifocal] which is divided into [centred] in which the image is composed on or around a centre or [polarised] in which elements are on a diagonal, vertical or horizontal axis. Opposite to [centrifocal] is [iterating] with the choices [aligned] in which similar visual elements are repeated across the image, such as rows, or [scattered] in which visual elements are randomly placed against one another. Similarly to Myskow's Levels of Evaluation framework, the three metafunctions are simultaneously generated and are based on the central theoretical principle that any act of communication involves choices.

Painter et al., (2013, p. 3) contend that although Kress and van Leeuwen's pioneering visual grammar work has provided an important foundation for the understanding of images, it is insufficiently developed to consider the relationships between images in a sequence, the range of possibilities related to point of view and the "emotional engagement with the reader in such texts". Feng and O'Halloran (2012, p. 2067) propose that "a large number of visually represented emotive behaviours are direct simulations of those in real life" and that there is a universal nature to basic emotions which they have explored through comics and graphic novels. Therefore this analysis will also be informed by visual theory related to the use of design elements (line, colour, shape, tone, texture) and principles (balance, rhythm, proportion, scale, contrast, and pattern) which are the foundation of visual language (Dinham, 2011). Zohrabi et al., (2019) describe the complementary nature of verbal and visual sources of meaning in picture books and how every semiotic fulfils ideational, interpersonal and

textual functions (Halliday, 1978; Thompson, 1996). Moya-Guajardo (2016) drawing from Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) work on visual grammar, argues that understanding how images and words are combined together to create meaning requires further investigation.

## Methods

The following section will discuss the four children's picture books *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914* (Hendrix, 2014), *And the Soldiers Sang* (Lewis and Kelley, 2011), *The Christmas Truce* (Duffy and Roberts, 2014), and *The Christmas Truce: The Place Where Peace Was Found* (Robinson and Impey, 2014) to explore the following question:

- How do the four children's picture books seek to incorporate historical authenticity in their representation of the Christmas Truce?

This analysis was undertaken using the key disciplinary activities of the three evaluative acts: inter-evaluate, super-evaluate, extra-evaluate and the fourth level of meta-evaluation from Myskow's Levels of Evaluation framework with reference to specific clauses from the four books related to historical authenticity. The images which are linked to the specific verbiage were considered using the approach of Painter et al., (2013) to explore their contribution to this investigation with particular focus on how they may "reveal new and sometimes ignored meanings" (Zohrabi, et al., 2019, p. 40) through the interpersonal, ideational and textual metafunctions. Given that each of the illustrations in the four children's books is created by a professional artist there is an imperative to also discuss how they have used design elements and principles to create additional levels of meaning. This is an important consideration as both author and illustrator need to understand one another's textual or visual semiotic system in order to make meaning using their semiotic approach. The collaboration between the author and the artist requires the harmonisation of alternatives "through the accumulation of varied points of view" (Gude, 1989, cited in Kerby et al., 2016, p. 119).

Data was collated into a table for each book under the categories of Image Content Description, Interpersonal Metafunction (Focalisation, Pathos and Affect, Ambience, Graduation), Ideational Metafunction (Character Manifestation, Character Appearance, Character Relations, Inter-event, Inter-circumstance), Textual Metafunction (Intermodal Integration, Layout, Framing, Focus), and Verbal Episode with specific clauses and observations related to Myskow's Levels of Evaluation framework. The data units of analysis included specific clauses from each story and the images on a spread with specific reference made to either the verso or recto image on a double page spread. Relationships between the four levels of evaluation and connections with the images where relevant were sought. Additional notes were also made in relation to the covers, pre-pages, title pages, end pages and the use of design elements and principles which informed the response to the research question. The data from these tables has informed the following analysis and discussion.

## Historical Relevance

Oteiza and Pineur (2016, p. 7) argue that in history "silences and exclusions [are] realized by those who have the power to select the facts". In describing how the historical memories of a

nation's past are transmitted, such as through children's picture books Oteiza (2020, p. 177), highlights the crucial role played by personal and social memories.  In this study the historical information which has been presented has been informed by, and sometimes subsumed, into another level of interpretation through the literary and artistic choices of the author and illustrator. The four children's books under discussion are all based on the personal memories of the characters, documented through diaries, letters and photographs. These images, drawn in some cases from actual historical objects, provide a particular perspective which contributes to the social memory of The Christmas Truce of 1914.

The visual style located in the Interpersonal metafunction using the system of PATHOS varies between each of the books. From the [engaging: empathic] style of *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914*; the [engaging: personalising] style of *And the Soldiers Sang*, the [engaging: appreciative] style in *The Christmas Truce* and the [engaging: empathic] style of *The Christmas Truce: The Place Where Peace Was Found.* As would be expected in books that seek to record an historical event the visual style is easily decipherable. There are discernible characters in *Shooting at the Stars* (Charlie), *And the Soldiers Sang* (Owen Davies), and *The Christmas Truce: The Place where Peace was Found* (Ben, Ray, Karl and Lars). However, *The Christmas Truce* does not feature a continuous identifiable character creating a sense of separation from the characters. Interestingly three of the books *Shooting at the Stars, The Christmas Truce, And the Soldiers Sang* contain page numbers, which is unusual for children's picture books, and perhaps suggests a claim to historical authenticity as 'real books'.

*Photographs*

In a verbal and visual analysis of the four children's picture books it became apparent that the authors and illustrators balance two often competing identities, that of the creators of a 'story' and as historians, whose currency is historical fact. As a result, the authorial voice and the demands of historical scholarship exist in an uneasy balance. The perceived veracity of the authorial voice, which is already the beneficiary of the widespread belief that children's fiction is often identified as a truth telling medium (MacCallum-Stewart, 2007, p. 178), is often augmented by the inclusion of features normally associated with historical scholarship. For example, John Hendrix's *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914* (2014) includes an historical overview, extensive author's note, a glossary and a bibliography. As part of the author's note there is a black and white photograph titled ''*A friendly chat with the enemy', Christmas Truce, photograph 1914*' which provides an officially sanctioned and historically credible view of the past through the text at the super-evaluative level. The historical actors are smiling and seemingly at ease with one another. The photograph is placed just above Hendrix's drawn trenches which have been a consistent feature throughout the book thereby combining historical evidence with the fictionalised story.

In their discussion of history textbooks Oteiza and Pineur (2016) refer to the inclusion of photographs which seemingly provide 'official' evidence of the past. However, they posit that from a socio-semiotic framework photographs are complex icons that are culturally constructed and therefore "cannot be interpreted as transparent, innocent and realistic" (p. 10). There is even greater complexity when photographs are included in children's picture

books, as they appear to signal an official authorial view by their inclusion. Reference to photographs, and therefore 'photographic evidence' appears in images from three of the four books under discussion. These include a soldier taking a photograph of four British and German soldiers holding a small Christmas tree in *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914.* As readers we observe the soldiers in this image, two are looking down and two straight ahead, they are not smiling and we do not engage with them through direct eye contact FOCALISATION [observe]. The colours are warm but dull AMBIENCE [muted: warm/removed] which appears to contrast with this pivotal moment. The image reaches the edges of the page INTERMODAL INTEGRATION [complementary: image privileged] making the reader feel part of this moment. The text below the image is positioned at the inter-evaluative level through the voice of Charlie (historical actor) "I can hardly describe to you what it was like here. We were talking with men **we were trying to kill just the day before!** [-ve Happiness]. A few of the lads had brought pocket cameras from home, **so they took pictures together**" [+ve Inclination].  This description echoes the off-key colours used in the image to describe the uncertainty of the soldiers who had previously been trying to kill each other and were then being photographed together. Painter et al., (2013) reveal that the proximity and orientation of visual characters can invoke Affect resources. In this case the soldiers are positioned closely together, two with their arms on each other shoulders, one slightly in front and the other close by (+ve Security). The text resonates at the inter-evaluative level as it is reported by the historical actor Charlie who has the authority and reliability by virtue of being immersed in the war and as an eye-witness to what has happened. The last clause "so they took pictures together" resonates at the super-evaluative level and provides a link back to the actual photograph included in the author's note which is positioned within the trench line setting established by the illustrator, emphasising the veracity of the story.

Drawn photographs appear at the end of *The Christmas Truce, the Place where Peace was found.* On Spread 13 there are a range of black and white and colour drawn photographs of mementoes from the life of Ray, one of the key representative participants and an eyewitness to the events of The Christmas Truce. This night time image which features Ray's mantelpiece and a reflected image of his lounge room in a warm and cosy setting AMBIENCE [defused: dramatized] is devoid of narrative text, although text is included on some of the historical artefacts. The decorated Christmas tree replete with candles provides a direct link to the candle burning in the trench art candle holder on the mantelpiece and through the artefacts to The Christmas Truce event. Historical artefacts, drawn with a high degree of accuracy and thereby seemingly more realistic, include the decorative brass tin Princess Mary sent to every person "wearing the King's uniform on Christmas Day 1914" (Museums Victoria, 2020, para. 2), the WW1 German (Saxon) belt buckle with the motto 'Providentiae Memor' ('Remember where you are from'), the trench art candle holder which has a cap badge of the London Rifle Brigade, an old Farrah's Original Harrogate Toffee Tin with a bullet hole through the corner, and a 1916 whistle and lanyard with the stamp J. Hudson & Co Birmingham from the Battle of the Somme. There is also a black and white drawn photograph in a frame with a group shot of German and British soldiers fraternising at Ploegsteert or Plugstreet as the British soldiers renamed it. This actual

village was eight miles south of Ypres and located in the south-west of Ploegsteert Wood. The plaque under the photo says "Plugstreet 1914 – The Place where Peace was Found" [+ve Veracity]. This text and the use of an actual historical geographic location from the Great War again reinforces the historical veracity of the story. The four main characters Ben, Ray, Karl and Lars are featured in the drawn black and white photograph. An enlarged copy of this image appears again on Spread 14 (recto) on top of an icy blue scratched ice background which immediately links the reader back to the wintry setting of The Christmas Truce in direct contrast to the warmth of Ray's living room [+ve Security]. The artefacts on the mantelpiece provide visual evidence of a story that is at once both universal *and* intensely personal (See Figure 1). As Wieviorka (2006) observes, this is the age of the witness, one in which "the individual and the individual alone [becomes] the public embodiment of history" (p. 97). The artist Martin Impey has included specific familial references in the images related to his own family's personal memories and experiences of the Great War (personal communication). This complex image seeks to establish historical credibility through the use of authentic objects from the time period.

**Insert Figure 1 here**

**Figure 1: Illustration by Martin Impey from *The Christmas Truce* by Hilary Robinson and Martin Impey – Published by Strauss House Productions**


*And the Soldiers Sang* includes a drawn photograph of a German soldier's daughter (head and shoulders) which is used as an introductory conversation topic between two enemy soldiers during The Christmas Truce. The speech bubbles in close proximity inform the interactive meaning INTERMODAL INTEGRATION [projected: meaning: locution] and capture the German soldier's conversation "Meine Töchterchen. Daughter" with the positive and affirmative response from the British soldier "**She's a beauty that one**" [+ve Appreciation]. The inter-evaluative level has allowed the historical actors to speak their thoughts and feelings, and in the process humanises both soldiers. It also adds a further claim to historical accuracy. The inclusion of text in the German language works in much the same way [+ve Veracity]. In the image, which has high colour saturation, we see a disembodied hand CHARACTER MANIFESTATION [metonymic: body part] that proffers the photo and is set against an inky blue background. This effect removes the setting from the battlefield to focus on the soldiers as people with families. The hand and the sepia coloured photograph FAMILIARITY [removed: historicised] denotes a particular period of time. The small curled edge of the photograph suggests that it has been carried by the soldier and is kept close. Kelley has paid particular attention to the girl's face to draw our eye to this focal feature, leaving her clothes less detailed. Due to the life-size scale of the hand, its proximity to the reader, and visual choices such as the inclusion of detail and high colour saturation, the viewer feels they are also part of this exchange (See Figure 2).

**Insert Figure 2 here**

**Figure 2: Illustration by Gary Kelley from *And the Soldiers Sang* by J Patrick Lewis – Published by Creative Editions**

In the *Christmas Truce* a German and British soldier sit together on a log facing the viewer, with the German soldier holding a photograph handed to him by the British soldier FOCALISATION [observe]. The text reads "I showed him a picture of my wife. *Ich zeigte ihm ein Foto meiner Frau. **Sie sei schön, sagte er**. He thought her beautiful, he said" [+ve Appreciation]. The British soldier is relaxed with his shoulders slumped down, smoking a pipe and looking at the German soldier. He has a smile on his face as he looks at the photograph clasped in both hands. They are sitting close to one another in contrast to their previous actions [+ve Security]. The direct quotation from the historical actors involved operates at the inter-evaluative level, providing a memory that seems more realistic, ironically because of its seeming disconnection from the actual context of enemies fighting. The viewer only sees the back of the photograph which provides a measure of authenticity due to its presence, in addition to the inclusion of the German language in the verbal exchange [+ve Veracity]. The framing of the image is of the represented characters with at least an equal amount of white space in the background INTERMODAL INTEGRATION [unbound: decontextualised] which brings them into greater focus. Both soldiers' helmets are set down beside them, a German leather picklehaube and English 'tin hat' [+ve Security] (See Figure 3). In terms of accuracy however, although the picklehaube is historically correct, none of the combatants at this time wore steel helmets, instead they initially wore cloth, felt or leather headgear. This historical inaccuracy only appears in this book, but it may be an intentional use of an anachronistic symbol.

**Insert Figure 3 here**

**Figure 3: Illustration by David Roberts from the book entitled *The Christmas Truce* written by Carol Ann Duffy - published by Macmillan Publishers Limited**

*Letters and Diaries*

*The Christmas Truce: The Place Where Peace Was Found* makes effective use of a dedication to two soldiers whose names have been chosen from a competition to mark the Centenary of the Christmas Truce and entered by their current-day relatives. This book also contains extracts from letters sourced from the Imperial War Museum and recommendations on the back cover from military historians, fittingly for this story, from Germany and the UK. *And the Soldiers Sang* (Lewis and Kelley, 2011) includes a full page replica of the iconic 'Lord Kitchener Wants You' recruitment poster on the pre-page, partially blocked by the back head and shoulders of a young man (later recruited soldier) wearing a patterned winter jumper FOCALISATION [mediated: inscribed], a map of the Western Front at the beginning of the story, a detailed image of the Princess Mary Christmas gift box, and a short historical note

at the end of the story [+ve Veracity]. *The Christmas Truce* has a short historical note on the back cover, but also enjoys the official sanction of having been written by a Poet Laureate. Historical authenticity is also achieved through the use of German language expressions which are included on Spreads 8 (translation: Silent Night), 13 (translation: Merry Christmas), 15 (German soldier commenting on a photograph), and 16 (translation: The Lord is My Shepherd). There are also references to specific food rations provided to the British Army during the Great War, including 'Maconochie's Stew' and 'Tickler's Jam'. This provides a sense of familiarity through a coded language for readers who are aware of these references. The back cover provides a synopsis which states "A century on from that extraordinary night, Carol Ann Duffy's beautiful and moving poem celebrates the miraculous truce between the trenches, when enemy shook hands with enemy, shared songs, swapped gifts, even played football, and peace found a place in No Man's Land." Although this is not part of the narrative text its inclusion on the back cover offers a sense of historical authority to the events that have taken place in the narrative at the Meta-evaluative level.

Of the four texts, it is Hendrix's *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914* (2014) that makes the most overt use of the authorial voice outside the actual narrative. Hendrix (2014), who is both author and illustrator, assures his readers through a juxtaposition that though the story is a "fictionalised telling of the Christmas Truce of 1914, **the events described are very real**" (p. 38) [+ve Veracity]. By using features associated with historical texts while simultaneously positioning fiction as an equal or perhaps even higher truth, Hendrix becomes a potent advocate for the literary understanding of the war. Yet he never fully sheds his role as an historian. In the first picture spread he includes a summary of the events leading up to the Great War which is superimposed on the setting of the British trench line (at night) used throughout the book. The last sentence of this section makes a pre-emptive claim for historical credibility: "This is **the true story of what happened** one cold winter evening" [+ve Veracity]. In the Author's Note which is again positioned on the same layout of British trench lines (during the day) Hendrix declares his determination at the super-evaluative level to "tell the story of this terrible war not from the distance of historical dates and famous battles, but from the eyes of one living it" (Author's Note, Hendrix, 2014, p. 38). Indeed, the framework of the story is a series of letters sent by a fictional British soldier (Charlie) to his mother in which he describes the truce. By arguing for the primacy of this 'experience' Hendrix both embraces historical scholarship and rejects it as an inferior truth telling device. It is an approach hinted at in his description of the nations of Europe falling into the conflict like "dominoes", a term far more evocative of the American fears for Asia after 1945 that drew that country into the Vietnam War than the events of July and August 1914. In Figure 4, the emotive use of Charlie's letter to his Mother in which only part of his hand is seen CHARACTER MANIFESTATION [metonymic: body part], explores the disconnect between patriotism and the reality of war. It is positioned next to a high perspective view of a trench system, still one of the most enduring images of the war,  which appears to have been overlaid with familiar notations, presumably from Charlie, including '<u>our boys</u>' and 'FRITZ' with arrows pointing to the allied trench line to indicate where No Man's Land is positioned. Dead soldiers can be seen in No Man's Land, however the jaunty style of writing and use of

language has the effect of reducing this tragedy, and perhaps is a deliberate ploy by Charlie in his retelling of the story to his Mother. This image is part of an INTER-EVENT [unfolding: succession: within a sequence] in which the reader is introduced to Charlie in the trench through progressively closer perspective images so he becomes instantly familiar. The layout on both verso and recto is part of the INTERMODAL INTEGRATION [integrated: expanded: instated/subsumed] contrasted with the lighter and warmer colours on the verso against a white background to the night view of the trench with dead soldiers scattered in the moonlight [-ve Security]. The juxtaposition of the two images is further emphasised through their framing on the verso INTERMODAL INTEGRATION [bound: contained] and recto [unbound: contextualised]. This serves to link the personal experience, which has been acknowledged as fictional, with the historical record. Both the text and the image appear more credible given the presence of the 'other' (Langer, 1991) and emphasise the ever present danger of Charlie's situation.

**Insert Figure 4 here**

**Figure 4: Illustration by John Hendrix from the book entitled *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914* by John Hendrix – published by Abrams Books for Young Readers**

The pivotal moment in the narrative in which The Christmas Truce is brokered between the enemy soldiers is captured by Duffy and Roberts in *The Christmas Truce* as a 'gift' with soldiers waving to one another [+ve Happiness], with washes of pink and grey to represent dawn AMBIENCE/WARMTH [infused: activated warmth] (See Figure 5). In *And the Soldiers Sang* Lewis describes this moment, which is at the super-evaluative level, as the soldiers "**taking their first halting steps** [+ve Tenacity] toward a court-martial offense on both sides: **fraternizing with the enemy** [-ve Tenacity]". In contrast, this moment in the narrative is illustrated by Kelley using a complementary layout placement with the top image split into three equal vertical rectangles to portray an action sequence INTERMODAL INTEGRATION [complementary: interpolating: verbiage medial]. A symbolic white flag appears in the first frame painted with the words '**YOU NO SHOOT WE NO SHOOT**' [+ve Tenacity], which indicates a willingness to communicate in a language that will be understood. The second frame has the figure emerging and the third frame shows the figure much closer walking towards the viewer. The bottom horizontal image is of a close-up view of hands not touching but about to be shaken as a British and German soldier meet. Both images are in darker tones AMBIENCE/VIBRANCY [muted: dark]. In contrast, Hendrix uses a daytime close up image of enemy soldiers' hands being shaken with significant detail including the spattering of mud on their sleeves. This image is enveloped by a yellow aura INTERMODAL INTEGRATION [complementary: image privileged] and is further explained through the spiritual nature of the text at the inter-evaluative level "They met and shook hands. Perhaps an angel of the Lord was among us today – what else could **create such spontaneous peace but the hand of God himself**? [+ve Happiness]" (See Figure 6). Robinson uses the extra-evaluative level to describe this complex moment: "These are the men who held out a hand, a sign of peace in No Man's Land". Impey complements this

moment with a detailed drawing of Ray and Ben, the two British soldiers and Karl and Lars, the two German soldiers PARTICIPANTS [reappear: unchanged], meeting in No Man's Land under a moonlit sky AMBIENCE [defused: dramatized]. They have been given identifying features so they are easily recognisable throughout the narrative CHARACTER RELATIONS [comparison: attributive]. A lit candle is held by one soldier in each pair further emphasising the symbolic sign of peace and hope [+ve Capacity].

**Insert Figures 5 and 6 here [could these go underneath each other please?]**

**Figure 5: Illustration by David Roberts from the book entitled *The Christmas Truce* written by Carol Ann Duffy - published by Macmillan Publishers Limited**

**Figure 6: Illustration by John Hendrix from the book entitled *Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914* by John Hendrix – published by Abrams Books for Young Readers**

The two texts that make the least use of historical context, *The Christmas Truce* (Duffy and Roberts, 2014), and *The Christmas Truce: The Place Where Peace Was Found* (Robinson and Impey, 2014), avoid a specific exploration of the soldiers' motivations. Duffy and Roberts engage more fully with the horror, as befits a work that draws so much of its inspiration from the war time soldier poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Robinson and Impey approach their task, though, as one equally driven by the determination to explore an historical event *and* to create a Christmas story. For example, the cover of the book emphasises the extent to which their efforts are culturally situated, including as it does a Christmas tree, Christmas lights and a gentle rather than foreboding winter scene For as Brown and Seaton (1994) contend, the truce is probably the "best and most heartening Christmas story of modern times" (p. xxv), suggesting perhaps that rather than being narrowly understood as an addition to the burgeoning literature of the Great War, it is perhaps equally a Christmas story, though in keeping with the modern festival, it can be enjoyed on a secular as well as a religious level. There are, however, a few knowing nods in *The Christmas Truce: The Place where Peace was Found* to the Christian parable of redemption. The image of the German and British soldiers attending a mass together in a shattered Church was well realised, though entirely fictionalised. Other images include a dove carrying an olive branch, a symbol redolent with connections to early Christianity, and a statue of an angel which situate the illustrations very solidly in a Judeo-Christian framework [+ve Veracity]. The sustained use of light, whether it be from a full moon, candles or lamps, shows that author and illustrator concur with the view that the truce was a "candle lit in the darkness of Flanders" (Weintraub, 2001, p. xvi).

As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) observe, visual language is culturally specific. By integrating a widely held view of the war and the even more powerful construct of Christmas, the authorial voice throughout the four books resonates with readers who recognise the historical framework in which it is presented. It is authentic because it is familiar. The power

of the authorial voice and each  book's promotion by the authors and the illustrators  as 'good history' firmly positions the Truce as a touchstone for modern audiences who see it as communicating essential truths about war and the human spirit, ones that are culturally situated.

## Conclusion

In April 1917 the British war correspondent Philip Gibbs found himself standing behind the lines at Arras in France as the Allied guns tore at the German front line prior to another doomed assault (Kerby, 2016a). Though a sensitive and humane man, Gibbs was, in spite of himself, strangely ambivalent about what he was witnessing. Though his experiences on the Somme the year before had no doubt prepared him for the carnage that was to follow, he found the bombardment "a beautiful and devilish thing". Like Sainsbury's almost a century later it was the "beauty of it and not the evil of it that put a spell upon one's senses" (*Daily Chronicle*, 10 April, 1917). The analysis of the four children's picture books using Myskow's Levels of Evaluation, the work on visual grammar undertaken by Kress and van Leeuwen and extended on by Painter et al., (2013), in addition to choices of specific visual design elements and principles, show that the authors and illustrators were drawn to an event that communicated a vision of human nature that appeared to them to be the antithesis of a futile war that destroyed a generation.  Similarly to other authors and illustrators who have tackled the Great War, the ones discussed in this article seek to transform an historical event into "universals of human experience" (Stephens, 1992, p. 238).  The positioning of the horror of war as a binary opposite to humanist values can, however, be a problematic construct, as it has become so automatic a convention that it does not always convey the horror that it is meant to express (Dyer, 1995, p. 27).

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