



This is a repository copy of *Towards a multimodal ethnohistorical approach: a case study of bookplates*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/169714/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

O' Hagan, L. (2019) *Towards a multimodal ethnohistorical approach: a case study of bookplates*. *Social Semiotics*, 29 (5). pp. 565-583. ISSN 1035-0330

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1497646>

---

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Social Semiotics* on 12 Jul 2018, available online:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/10350330.2018.1497646>.

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



[eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk)  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

# **Towards A Multimodal Ethnohistorical Approach: A Case Study of Bookplates**

## **1. Introduction**

Ethnohistory is a well-established methodology within the field of anthropology that uses archival material and historical records to explore communities and practices that have long since disappeared. Typically, ethnohistory focuses on groups of people whose perspectives are underrepresented in official narratives of history backed by national institutions of power (Faudree and Pharao Hansen 2013, 240). Ethnohistory shares many commonalities with social semiotics: both draw attention to the range of social and cultural resources that are available to a person in a specific context, as well as the motivations that influence a person's selection from these resources, how these resources are organised to create meaning and the social effects that they may have. Therefore, it seems extraordinary that ethnohistorical approaches have not been widely adopted in social semiotic research.

This paper argues that multimodality as a framework of analysis can be vastly improved through the adoption of an ethnohistorical approach in which hypotheses concerning the function and form of artefacts are derived and explored from concrete historical documents. By treating texts as dynamic objects that do not exist in vacuity, ethnohistory allows a denser and more layered multimodal analysis to be carried out. Furthermore, examining the specific values and epistemologies of their creators enables texts to be made sense of within a larger and broader context of patterned practices and sociopolitical forces.

This study uses a sample of four Edwardian (1901-1914) bookplates to demonstrate how the co-application of multimodality and ethnohistory can enrich our understanding of social class in early-twentieth-century Britain. The Edwardian era marked a period of acute social tensions. The disaster of the Anglo Boer War, the growth in socialism and trade unionism, and the women's suffrage movement all contributed to a sharpening of class consciousness. While the upper classes wanted to preserve the "hallowed structure" (Altick 1957, 85) of Edwardian society, the lower classes craved a sweeping reconstruction of social hierarchy. Bookplates reveal important new ways in which to explore this class conflict and act as a microcosm of the more general concerns about social class and power that existed at this time. These findings would not be possible with a multimodal approach alone.

## **2. Exploring Bookplates**

Bookplates are small, decorative labels used to denote book ownership. While the first recorded use of a bookplate in Britain was in 1574 (Pearson 1998, 56), it was not until the nineteenth century that they became popularised as a result of Victorian commodity culture and Britain's growing obsession with portable property, defined by Plotz (2008, 2) as "everyday culture-bearing objects."

Traditionally, bookplates were the stronghold of the upper classes who commissioned artists to custom design armorials with heraldic symbols relating to their family heritage or typographical designs that used ciphers or rebuses to indicate their family name. During the mid-nineteenth century, as the Victorian concern for respectability grew, book owners began to recognise the potential of bookplates as identity markers. Consequently, pictorial forms emerged, which were characterised by large images that reflected elements of the tastes, temperaments and dispositions of their owners.

Scott (1902, 20) argues that pictorials transformed bookplates into an artform and were directly responsible for filtering down usage to the middle classes. Keen to profit from the widespread growth of bookplates amongst a new middle-class audience, stationers and booksellers started to offer bookplate design as an in-house service. While this was a cheaper option than appointing an artist, the 1890 pattern book of the London-based J & E Bumpus lists bookplates varying from £2 to £50 in price<sup>1</sup>, which indicates that they were still by no means affordable to all. By the beginning of the Edwardian era, the application of newspaper print methods and machinery meant that cheaper mass-produced bookplates could be printed and bought in bulk from booksellers. This drastically changed the bookplate market, enabling the lower classes to afford them for the first time. In a society in which everything was organised around the concept of class, bookplates became ideal weapons in strategies of distinction (Bourdieu, 2010, 70). Whether to uphold ranks or keep distance, owners used particular semiotic choices to assert themselves in a social space and set themselves apart from others.

Despite their historical, cultural and literary significance, bookplates remain an extremely underdeveloped field of research. Thus far, the vast semiotic potential that they afford has been widely overlooked by linguists, and it is only within the field of provenance studies that they have been explored in any depth. Furthermore, most literature available on bookplates predates the Edwardian era, as the late-nineteenth century was a time in which great public interest first arose in the topic. In addition, existing studies have been strictly limited to armorial designs. This is because provenance studies are concerned with the chronology of the ownership of historical objects, and armorials provide extensive information on upper-class figures of society. However, this study will demonstrate that, by introducing an ethnohistorical context to multimodal analysis, the semiotic choices in pictorial and typographical bookplates can also reveal facts about their owners, be they working-class, middle-class or upper-class.

### **3. Towards an Ethnohistorical Approach to Multimodality**

One of the most important and influential works on multimodality was carried out in 1996 by Kress and van Leeuwen. They established the first social semiotic framework for analysing images in their seminal book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Within this framework, semiotic resources are conceptualised as interrelated systems of meaning which together constitute and manifest culture (O'Halloran *et al.* 2016, 7). According to Kress and van Leeuwen, such systems are organised according to three metafunctions: the representational, the interpersonal and the compositional, each of which roughly corresponds to the three Hallidayan metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, textual) of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Each semiotic resource within the system has a meaning potential which is realised in combination with other choices in order to accomplish a communicative goal (Machin 2007, 3-4).

While Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar is a useful tool for examining the ways in which images communicate meaning, it has received criticism from a range of scholars for its reliance on small datasets that offer limited empirical evidence (Bezemer and Jewitt 2010, 194) and its neglect of external reasons for design choices, such as genre conventions (Bateman 2008, 46) and sociocultural context (Durie 1997, 92). Furthermore, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Equivalent to modern-day values of £220 to £5,500.

Hallidayan concepts that it uses can often conceal external reasons for particular semiotic choices based on canons of use. This often leads to overwhelmingly subjective analyses that give “a post hoc rationalisation of design decisions” (Bateman *et al.* 2004, 67) that may have occurred for other reasons independent of the image itself. When exploring historical artefacts, such as bookplates, these issues are particularly relevant, as they risk obscuring the people involved in their production and downplaying the complexities of the Edwardian sociopolitical landscape.

Adopting an ethnohistorical approach, through which choices of image, colour, typography and materiality are grounded in archival research, can vastly improve multimodal analysis. Ethnohistory provides a model that is built on primary evidence and foregrounds social practices as being anchored in the systems and the institutions of the social world. Furthermore, by focusing on the typically underrepresented in history and the idea that each group must be understood in its own terms, ethnohistory strives to ensure that analyses are no longer biased judgements made by privileged white people over fragile or primitive cultures (Sheehan 1969, 269). Ethnohistory also has the advantage of being able to move both forward and back in time (Axtell 1979, 5). This means that not only can cultural patterns be explored in their original historical context of use, but they can also be used to inform current and future practices. In the case of social class, the focus of this study, this is especially helpful, given the continued disparities between certain economic and social groups in British society.

Ethnohistorical methodologies were first used in the 1930s by Fritz Röck to explore African culture through historical artefacts, but they became widely employed in the United States in the 1950s as a result of the Indian Claims Act of 1946, which sought to give voice to the claims of Native American tribes over land. In the field of linguistics, ethnohistorical approaches were largely pioneered by Dell Hymes (1962) under the umbrella term of “linguistic anthropology” through which an “ethnography of communication” was established to analyse patterns of language use within speech communities. Despite the fact that many of Hymes’ research methods are ethnohistorical in nature, the term has not gained widespread usage amongst linguists. Instead, the method is generally referred to as an “ethnography of documents” (Laurier and White 2001, 4), the “anthropology of writing” (Barton and Papen 2010, 3), or simply, a “historical approach to ethnography” (Gillen 2013, 491). Here, I reinstate the anthropological term “ethnohistory”, as its definition by Faudree and Pharaoh Hansen (2013) seems to best encompass the aim of this study:

Ethnohistory – understood as the histories of indigenous people, ethnic minorities and marginalised genders or classes – is a field where attention to language has been employed successfully to construct complex pictures of past sociality. The field differentially integrates methods and theories from a diverse set of disciplines, including social history, historical linguistics, linguistic anthropology and critical theory. (240)

In recent years, linguistic anthropologists have begun to show a growing interest in semiotic perspectives on ethnography. Katriel (2015, 458), for example, has suggested that, in the light of new technology, ethnographic methodologies must begin to encompass interconnections between modes in terms of performativity and materiality. However, the most

fervent supporters of the co-application of multimodal and ethnographic methodologies remain those working in New Literacy Studies, such as Pahl and Rowsell (2006). They have argued that both disciplines are well-placed to address each other's strengths and weaknesses: ethnography can provide multimodality with concrete evidence to support analysis and explore texts within the context of wider social and political forces, while multimodality can offer ethnography an analytic tool to understand the texts.

As this study will demonstrate, the co-application of ethnohistorical and multimodal approaches brings further advantages. First, ethnohistory enables the identities of people to be investigated within a particular time period, which may carry important meanings on a local, national and global level. This means that arguments are rooted in historical concreteness, thus ensuring that generalisations are not made until sufficiently detailed groundwork has been laid (Axtell 1979, 4). Furthermore, ethnohistory incorporates an abundance of theory from sociology, philosophy and cultural studies related to power, ideology and distinction, which can provide multimodality with working hypotheses, avenues of approach and problem areas that can be refined and tested. Introducing an ethnohistorical perspective to multimodality also ensures more flexibility in interpretation, as it acknowledges that meanings in texts are not necessarily fixed and do not always adhere to specific configurations. Considering social norms, cultural expectations and the broader social and cognitive motivations that may affect the way in which a text is created and interpreted may help expand Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) proposed criteria for recognising configurations, thus enabling texts to be analysed in ways that are empirically motivated and predictive. Finally, the introduction of multimodal analysis to ethnohistory resolves the long-standing issue within anthropology of how to blend synchronic analysis with diachronic narratives. It facilitates the use of concrete examples to reconstruct general cultural patterns and to relate a culture's parts to its whole.

#### **4. Methodology**

As a case study, four bookplates belonging to a member of each class group (working-class, lower-middle class, upper-middle class and upper-class) in Edwardian society have been selected for multimodal ethnohistorical analysis. These bookplates come from a wider dataset of 3,000 Edwardian book inscriptions that were collected primarily from Bookbarn International in Hallatrow, Somerset and categorised into groups based on their mode of production (i.e. mass-produced, recontextualised, stationers', artists'). The bookplates selected for study are prototypical examples (Rosch 1975) that share the same central and peripheral features (i.e. layout, image, colour, typography, material construction) and types of users as the other bookplates within each of the four groups in the larger dataset. Thus, the results of their analysis can be said to be representative. Table 1 summarises the four types of bookplate that will be analysed in terms of their prototypical features and primary users.

**INSERT TABLE 1 HERE**

Table 2 shows a summary of the two main stages of data analysis that were undertaken: the first focuses on the bookplates, while the second concentrates on the role of people and institutions in their creation.

In all bookplates, the images have been explored using relevant elements of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) representational, interpersonal and compositional metafunctions to determine the use of participants, salience, modality, visual framing and distribution of information value. In addition, the style and cultural connotation of typeface (van Leeuwen, 2006) have been considered, as well as the value and modulation categories of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2002) semiotics of colour. The bookplates have also been investigated in reference to their material features. The semiotics of materiality was developed by O'Hagan (2015), and is made up of writing implement, printing technique, paper and physical setting. Here, it also encompasses Djonov and van Leeuwen's (2011) separate category of texture, as texture in bookplates can be a tangible or metaphorical property.

When interpreting Edwardian bookplates, it is also important to consider the physical copy of the books in which they are found, as, by the early-twentieth century, the physical appearance of the book came to bear as much meaningful information as the printed text itself (Lerer 2012, 127). A book's format, paper type, typeface, covers and spine, for example, can offer valuable clues into the social status and wealth of the book owner. Furthermore, booksellers' stamps can indicate where books were purchased, while publisher's advertisements and promotional dossiers can highlight books' intended audiences.

The analysis also draws upon the work of Hymes (1962), particularly his 'Model of Interaction of Language and Social Setting', which was developed to characterise the different features of a communicative situation. The model consists of eight components organised under the mnemonic SPEAKING (Setting, Participants, Ends, Acts, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms and Genres). It is also worth briefly mentioning that this model has some overlap with Halliday's (1985) model of register, which is made up of field (the activities and processes that are happening at the time of speech), tenor (the people that take part in an event, as well as their relationships and statuses) and mode (the channel and genre of the text). While Hymes' model was created with a spoken context in mind, the SPEAKING components arguably fit into a scribal context as well. In the case of bookplates, gathering information on the participant(s) involved in their construction can help to establish the composition of their relationships, as well as how acts were ordered within the bookplate process as it moved from initial design to finished product.

This evidence has been primarily obtained from [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) using censuses, birth, marriage and death certificates, military records, passenger lists and street directories. Charles Booth's 1903 Poverty Maps (<https://booth.lse.ac.uk>), which classify streets into seven colours from black to yellow based on class and wealth, have also been used to determine the social class of bookplate owners, while the Archive of British Publishing and Printing at the University of Reading has provided data on the artists, engravers, printers, stationers or booksellers involved in the book production and bookplate process. Information provided by newspapers and magazines (i.e. *The Times*, *Illustrated London News*, *The Boy's Own Paper*, *The Girl's Own Paper*) on key events that were happening in the world at the same time as the bookplate was being produced has also been collected. All of this evidence can provide

multimodality with primary evidence to reduce its potential subjectivity and elucidate the original intentions of the owner.

The linguistic form of the bookplates has also been taken into consideration, notably the type of language, spelling and register used by the owner and what this may reveal about their social status and education. Form may also reveal selection rules that govern the use of particular message forms when a choice is made between possible alternatives (i.e. whether the owner uses their full name, a nickname, an honorific etc.). These choices disclose information about the social status of the owner and the “face” (Goffman 1959) they wish to present to those who come into contact with their bookplate. Acknowledging the performative function of bookplates as forms of cultural capital gives additional meaning to the semiotic and material choices of book owners and suggests that particular design choices may have been influenced more by owners’ social goals than strict rules of composition.

**INSERT TABLE 2 HERE**

## 5. Analysis

**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

Figure 1 shows a mass-produced typographical bookplate. It belonged to the working-class Florence Emily Barthorp and was found in *Garden Colour*, a book on botany by Mrs C.W. Earle. Florence was born in 1885 and was 20 years old at the time of inscription. She was the wife of a farm labourer and lived in Holbeach, Lincoln [1911 census]. Her choice of book suggests an interest in gardening and cultivation, which were typically considered to be middle-class pursuits at this time. Thus, the book provides material evidence that some unskilled members of the working class had an interest in ‘respectable’ leisure pursuits – something that was often refuted by Edwardian scholars (i.e. Masterman 1909). The book’s high-quality material construction and price of 5s<sup>2</sup> [J.M. Dent & Co. 1905 Catalogue] suggest that Florence may have had to have saved up in order to purchase it.

Florence’s bookplate is framed by a pictorial border. Here, text and image stand together as separate but interdependent parts of a single whole in a complementary relationship, which Barthes terms “relay” (1977, 41). The quote “a hunt in such a forest never wearies” only gains meaning when it is combined with the repeated patterning of books and branches of trees in the bookplate’s border. Through linking the fragments of a more general syntagm, the reader is able to visualise a metaphorical forest of books through which Florence untiringly wades. This theory that the way in which an object is perceived is determined by the total context or field in which it exists was first put forward by the Gestalt School of psychology in 1912 (Zakia 2007, 28). Within this bookplate, the Gestalt notions of proximity (the closer two or more visual elements are, the greater the probability that they will be seen as a group or pattern), similarity (visual elements that are similar tend to be seen as related) and continuity (visual elements that

---

<sup>2</sup> £28 in modern money.

require the fewest number of interruptions will be grouped) all serve to provide a “visual beat” (*ibid*, 2007:39) that establishes equilibrium and facilitates the connections between each element. Similarly, the symmetrical composition and equidistant spatial arrangement serve to connote equal power and continuity between each sign (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:197). It is also interesting to note that the border is black, while the books and branches within it are white. Van Leeuwen (2011:192) notes that light is often valued as a sign of hope. This sharp contrast between the two colours suggests a struggle (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 53) between the hope that books offer and Florence’s predestined position in the world.

The quote is recorded in Hardy’s (1897) *Book-Plates* in reference to the bookplate of Lewis Bosch on which it first appeared. Its transferral to a mass-produced design highlights the popularity of pre-packaging well-known quotes related to bibliophilia. However, as Jaffe (1999, 135) stated in her study of pre-packaged messages in greeting cards, these messages are only effective if they tap into collective ideas or experiences. The fact that Florence bought the bookplate indicates that she was able to appropriate personal meaning from its generic message. Thus, like greeting cards, it is clear that mass-produced bookplates cannot be seen as “meaningless assemblages of generic sentiment” (*ibid* 1997, 138) when they are explored within their context of use. This demonstrates how, even with their limited room for manoeuvre in terms of identity construction, working-class Edwardians were able to derive their own meaning from mass-produced bookplates.

The centre of the bookplate features the printed ‘this book belongs to...’, which constitutes an unfinished sentence that invites Florence to inscribe her name below. The inscription is written in black ink in an abbreviated form (F.E. Barthorp). In a legal setting, initials are typically used to confirm one’s identity, while a signature creates commitment to a particular act (Kettle and Häubl 2011, 485). Here, by blending both elements, Florence’s inscription serves not only as a testimony of ownership, but also as a type of formal agreement with the contents and ideas reflected in the bookplate. This is particularly important given the fact that the Women’s Property Act had only recently come into force, which granted married women the right to the ownership of personal property for the first time.

## INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Figure 2 shows a typographical booklabel design that was found in the 1910 edition of the adventure novel *Ungava* by R.M. Ballantyne. Its owner was Fred Dane, a lower-middle-class clerk from Crewe [1911 census] who was 19 years old at the time of inscription. *Ungava* was first published in 1857, and this particular edition, published by Ward, Lock & Co., would have been one of multiple reprints that were carried out over the forty-eight years after its initial publication. Entwistle (1990, 326) claims that *Ungava* remained in print for so many years because its messages on imperialism and patriotism made it an appropriate prize book for lower-class boys. While most copies of *Ungava* were priced between 3d and 6d<sup>3</sup> and printed on cheap, pictorial boards, Fred’s copy came from the *Sentinel Series of Gift Books* and had

---

<sup>3</sup> Roughly £1 to £3 in modern-day money.



the higher price of 2s<sup>4</sup> [Ward, Lock & Co. Prize and Gift Book Catalogue, 1906]. More expensive editions often boasted decorative gilt boards and fancy lettering, both of which can be seen in Fred's book.

The contrast between the topic and the material construction of Fred's book show his moral struggle between embracing the middle-class life that he has entered and rejecting the lower-class values in which he was brought up. This conflict was frequently mentioned by young Edwardians who had become clerks and moved up the social ladder, leaving their families on the rung below: "Doing something different from the rest of the family has made them regard my actions somewhat suspiciously. They think you are a snob, and you have the conflict between intellectual isolation or running away from your family and friends" (anonymous, cited in Rose 2010, 288). According to Wild (2006, 126), the search for belonging was one of the main reasons why clerks were at the forefront of the successful recruitment drive for soldiers upon the outbreak of World War One. Fred was one of these soldiers: he enlisted in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in 1915. Unlike many of his peers, Fred survived the war and returned to his job as a clerk in 1918 [British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920].

Fred's bookplate also provides support for the notion of the clerk as an outsider looking for a place to belong: unable to afford a printed bookplate from a stationer or bookseller, Fred has used his business card as a substitute. Business cards shared many characteristics with traditional booklabels (i.e. owner's name and address, lack of bordering and image, rectangular shape, card material), so they could be easily transferred into this new context without anybody realising their original purpose. This was particularly important for lower-middle class Edwardians, such as Fred, who were often criticised by their upper-class peers for aspiring to social positions that were unattainable to them. The fact that the bookplate is rectangular is also significant, as this type of geometric shape is traditionally associated with immutability and order (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 52). For somebody who was keen to hold onto their status in class society, this characteristic would have been particularly important to Fred.

In accordance with expected norms (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:203-207), the most salient element of Fred's bookplate appears in the centre: his name. His address is printed in the bottom left corner, mimicking the traditional layout of a letter. Fred's name and address are printed in a classic copperplate font, which resembles handwriting. Thompson (1965, 12) notes that printed copperplate was often based on the owner's actual handwriting. Therefore, the cursive slope of its glyphs acts as a personal testimony to confirm that *Ungava* is the property of Fred. The fact that the bookplate was originally a business card brings additional meaning, as the principal job of a clerk was to carry out basic bookkeeping and stenography. Thus, the use of Fred's personal handwriting in his business card also acts as a metaphorical depiction of his job role. This is further accentuated by the horizontal orientation of the card, which encourages viewers to think abstractly and enter the space as if they were entering a real, physical landscape (i.e. Fred's workplace) (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 195).

Although we may read Fred's business card as an attempt to give the impression that he belonged, Crossick (1977, 39) warns that simply categorising lower-middle-class Edwardians, such as Fred, as showing "contempt for the classes below and envy for the classes above" is to misjudge them. Instead, Fred's bookplate, which risked exposing his true social

---

<sup>4</sup> Roughly £10 in modern-day money.

status, should be viewed as an effort to establish an appropriate means of differentiating his own expectations. Thus, as Bailey (1999, 286) suggests, when thinking about people like Fred, it may be more useful to redefine ‘imitation’ as ‘appropriation’ and ‘pretension’ as ‘performance’.

### INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

Figure 3 shows a plain armorial bookplate, which belonged to the upper-middle-class Langford Lovell Price, and was found in the 1902 edition of *Studies in Modern Music*. Price was 50 years old at the time of inscription and working as an economist in London. His previous jobs had included treasurer of Oriel College, Oxford, lecturer in Statistics at University College, London and examiner in the moral sciences tripos at Cambridge University [1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 census].

*Studies in Modern Music* is a 4th edition, written by William Henry Hadow and published by Seeley & Co. The 1902 Seeley & Co. advertising catalogue prices this edition at 7s<sup>5</sup>. Its expensive price is reflected in the book’s navy blue leather boards, gilt lettering and vellum paper. Coupled with Price’s choice of bookplate, all features serve as status symbols that highlight his wealth.

Armorial bookplates have their origins in heraldry, which has its own language with its own semantics and grammar, demonstrated in the syntax and rhetoric of blazoning (Vanrigh 2009, 229). For this reason, armorials are generally considered as part of a semiotic domain in which the meaning of signs is fixed by precise rules (van Leeuwen, 2005:5). Most depict “conceptual structures” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:79) made up of symbolic attributes, which can be recognised as such by being made salient through foregrounding, detail and colour. In this bookplate, the represented participants are inanimate objects that form part of an exhaustive part-whole analytical structure in which each individual element (attribute) makes up the whole picture (carrier) (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:97). Traditionally, only those with a right to a coat of arms could use armorials. However, the growth of stationer-designed bookplates in the early-twentieth century jeopardised this conventional practice, as “no effort was made to ensure that the heraldry was accurate, or that the owner was entitled to bear arms” (The Bookplate Society 2008:3). Price’s steel engraved bookplate is an example of this.

Given that Price is not listed in the College of Arms database, which records all British recipients of coats of arms, it is highly likely that he was not legally entitled to one. This may explain why despite having the financial means to afford an artist-designed bookplate, Price opted instead for a stationer’s design. Stationers did not question claims to authenticity, as they were far more concerned with making profit than upholding tradition.

The dubitable authenticity of Price’s bookplate is reflected in the various attributes of the armorial that form a part-whole analytical structure (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:97). The shield shows a repeated image of a boy with a snake wrapped tightly around his neck. This

---

<sup>5</sup> Roughly £30 in modern-day money.

image is strongly associated with the history of the Vaughans, not the Prices. The Vaughans were an ancient Welsh family originating from Brycheiniog (now part of Powys), and were first granted a coat of arms in the fourteenth century when Roger Vaughan died at the Battle of Agincourt defending King Henry V. The coat of arms was inspired by the legend that three sons in the Vaughan family were born with an adder around their necks. Although snakes are today associated with negative characteristics of evil and deceit, in the Medieval period, snakes were connected with purity, wisdom and holiness, as they come from the same family as the noble dragon (Lenders and Janssen 2014:1). Given that this legend was well-known in Wales, Price may have appropriated the symbols for his own coat of arms to claim links with this powerful family. Above the shield, there is a two-tone wreath with the same image resting on top. This repetition suggests continuity between each sign (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:197) and emphasises the positive qualities of strength, nobility and defiance associated with this famous legend.

The shield itself is a fourteenth century English design (Velde 2000), which may have been chosen deliberately for its links with Roger Vaughan's death at Agincourt. The shield has three triangular edges, which "aim the message" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 53) of the picture. The use of shading gives a realistic appearance to the shield, reinstating it with its original intention of being used as a protective device in battle. Within the normative discourse of heraldry, shading and colour differentiation also have specific meanings associated with the family's background. Again, Price draws upon the Vaughan coat of arms in his choice of colours. The crossed horizontal and vertical lines on the shield's background represent sable (i.e. the tincture black). The name derives from the black fur of the sable (a type of carnivorous mammal) and is said to be suitable for the deeply religious, as it signifies knowledge, piety and serenity. Given that Price's father was an Anglican vicar, the adoption of the tincture is likely to have been a conscious choice on his part. The shield is separated in two by a dotted fess (a broad horizontal stripe across the centre of the field). According to Pearson (1998, 68), these dots represent gold. Kress and van Leeuwen (2002:356) consider gold to be a colour of high saturation with strong value-laden meanings of opulence and wealth. Price may have knowingly chosen the hue to indicate his affluence.

Price's name is printed in a separate frame beneath the shield in a traditional gothic font. This choice of font is also likely to be intentional, given that the shield design and images are strongly linked to the fourteenth century. When all three elements are viewed as a combined whole, they work together to highlight the supposed fact that Price can trace his family heritage back several hundreds of years. The fact that the bookplate itself has no borders suggests "weak framing" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 214) and creates a strong connection between the book and the bookplate, as both are joined in a continuous flow. This interconnectedness presents both items as combined units of information and serves to express Price's identity through linking himself with the book's content (*ibid*).

This bookplate is a clear demonstration of the ways in which a book owner could use semiotic choices to carry out "social posturing" (Hammond 2006,13), that is, using objects to display desirable behaviours or social expectations. Most significantly, the fact that this social posturing is carried out by a member of the upper-middle class demonstrates how the search for social acceptance and respectability was not limited to lower-middle-class Edwardians, as is often assumed. On first appearance, the armorial appears to show an authentic coat of arms.

It is only through archival research that it could be revealed to be a fake. Given his social status and high reputation, most Edwardians who came into contact with Price's book would have accepted his bookplate at face value and thus accorded him with the equivalent cultural capital.

## INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

Figure 4 shows a pictorial library interior bookplate, which belonged to the upper-class Edith Bessie Cook and was found in the 1914 edition of *A Cluster of Grapes* – a collection of Edwardian poetry. Cook was a 'lady of leisure' who lived at Warfield Hall in Berkshire. She was 35 years old at the time of inscription. According to the 1914 advertising catalogue of Erskine MacDonald, *A Cluster of Grapes* was the most expensive book they sold at 10s<sup>6</sup>. Its high price was due to the fact that the book was a limited-edition print run. Cook's bookplate was custom-designed by Edward Wheeler Fox, an illustrator who regularly contributed to *Punch*, and printed on expensive copperplate paper. His name can be seen in the bottom left-hand corner of the bookplate. A bookplate by Wheeler Fox is likely to have cost around £20<sup>7</sup> and demonstrates the disposable income that Cook had at this time. Thus, the book and its bookplate work together to project an image of Cook as a wealthy and important Edwardian.

The bookplate shows one represented participant: the lady (an animate object), who is believed to be Cook herself. The RP is involved in a transactional action process with the book that she is reading (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 73). Being the most salient part of the picture and the nucleus of information, the lady assumes the role of Actor. As she is instigating the movement of reading, the book with which she interacts takes the role of Goal (*ibid*). From how she is presented, Cook gives off a lot of information about upper-class life in Edwardian Britain. The bookplate features decorative furnishings, such as a William Morris armchair, a solid wooden dresser and wooden sideboards, as well as a pre-Raphaelite painting on the back wall. This painting parallels the actual lady sitting in the bookplate, thus employing the "Droste effect" of a picture appearing within another picture. These elements act as circumstances that serve as deliberate displays of wealth and high social status. Although they could be removed without affecting the chief process of the picture, their deletion would entail a great loss of information (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 71). The use of shading gives the furniture the textural quality of wood. Djonov and van Leeuwen (2011, 547) argue that texture is often also tied up with people's prior physical experiences, or what they call "experiential meaning potential" (2011:547). In this context, the concept of wood as solid and dependable may have been used as a metaphorical representation of the durable social status of the lady herself. The wood-like shading also grants the bookplate's border with the properties of a physical frame, which further accentuates its function as a rigid structure that surrounds something. However, it is interesting to note that the pre-established borders of the bookplate are bypassed by the branches of the plant, which intrudes onto its white frame. Disconnecting elements of the bookplate and overlapping them into a new site of appearance (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006,

---

<sup>6</sup> £37 in modern money.

<sup>7</sup> £2,240 in modern money

214) emphasises Cook's high social status and the fact that her power cannot be confined to one spatial position. Equally, it encourages a closer interpersonal relationship between the reader in the bookplate (i.e. Edith Bessie Cook) and the reader of the bookplate, and the fact that they both share the experience of holding and reading the same poetry book.

The lady herself is the epitome of a 'Gibson Girl' – a pen and ink illustration of the Edwardian feminine ideal of beauty. Known for her high-neck bodice pouched dresses and pompadour hairstyle, these features are reflected in the woman in the bookplate. Here, the lady is engaged in an act of offer (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 124). She is not interested in the viewer and, instead, is totally engrossed in her book. Sawhney (2006) argues that this pose implies the fetishisation of the female as a result of male fantasy. This is supported by Chartier (2002, 173), who argues that female reading was often associated with sensual pleasure and secret intimacy.

According to Tagg (1988, 37), in Edwardian Britain, frontality was considered "a code of social inferiority." Thus, the oblique angle of Cook also serves as a message that states she is not one of us. Furthermore, Johnson (2000) argues that direction in portraits was determined by a set of unwritten laws that indicated that a person facing left was looking to past accomplishments, while a person facing right was looking to the future. Given that Cook was part of the upper class who feared the collapse of Britain's hierarchical society, it is significant that her bookplates may have been used to foreground the 'glorious past' in a bid to hold onto it.

Cook's full name etched on the banderole below her image is particularly striking. The emboldening of her initials increases its salience (van Leeuwen 2006, 148), while acting as an "elaboration" (Barthes 1977, 49) that reinstates the same message in two different ways (i.e. visual and verbal) to strengthen its meaning. By creating an "anchorage" (Barthes, 1977:38), the viewer engages with the image first and then uses the text to fix a more definite and precise understanding. Given its private commission, Cook would have decided how to be presented in the image. As books were often shared with other people, the choice to include expensive furnishings and clothing is likely a deliberate one to display her wealth and high social status.

In contrast to the previous examples, Cook's bookplate has the aim of perpetuating her high social status. Bourdieu (2010, 49) notes that the upper classes remained strongly attached to the former state of affairs and considered it sacrilegious to reunite "tastes which taste dictates should be separate." Thus, from her elevated position, Cook uses her bookplate as a legitimate form of domination, paying strong attention to face needs and presentation of self.

## **5. Conclusions**

Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2000, 138) and Bezemer and Jewitt (2010, 194) have argued that multimodality can only ever be one element of an interdisciplinary whole which must also encompass other theories and methodologies. This case study of bookplates has demonstrated how an ethnohistorical approach to multimodality offers one such way of enriching our current understanding of the semiotic features that make up a text. It has also highlighted that, by providing arguments that are supported by historical evidence, we can gain further insight into the particular ideologies, cultures and traditions of British Edwardians and how they contributed to the creation of bookplates. Most importantly, this approach has revealed that semiotic and material choices were largely influenced by 'class-based affordances' that

constrained the ways in which certain social groups were able to pursue their communicative goals.

Despite the fact that her bookplate was mass-produced, the working-class Florence Emily Barthorp appropriated her own personal meaning from its generic message, the declaration of her name being particularly poignant considering the recent passing of the Women's Property Act. Furthermore, the topic of her book (gardening) reflected a middle-class hobby, indicating her awareness of the book as a source of intellectual emancipation. The lower-middle-class Fred Dane had similar aspirations, using his self-made bookplate as a performative construct of social mobility. Keen to carve his own niche in society, Fred's business card served as a defensive response to a sense of threat and uncertainty at belonging. However, its self-constitution meant that Fred was deprived of any actual profits associated with recognised status.

Although he was a member of the upper-middle class, Langford Lovell Price's bookplate also shows an attempt at "social posturing". His coat of arms and heraldic symbols, albeit spurious, serve to highlight his rich pedigree. Unlike Fred Dane, however, Price's educational background and occupation would have meant that his bookplate was accepted unquestionably by those around him. This indicates the inequality and different standards that existed in Edwardian Britain based on social class and provides support for Thomson's (2016, 18) belief that those who begin with particular forms of capital are advantaged from the outset. In contrast, Edith Bessie Cook, who was situated at the top of the social hierarchy, used the visual and verbal signs in her bookplate as a bold showcase of her high social status and wealth. For Cook, the bookplate was an item of cultural capital, a mechanism that enabled cultural consumption "to fulfil a social function of legitimating social difference" (Bourdieu 2010, 7).

These findings indicate how individuals carried out the same social practice yet assigned it with different meanings based on their own communicative goals. Through their bookplates, the upper classes transformed into inventors of the "stylisation of life" (Bourdieu 2010, 50), while the classes below (particularly the lower-middle class) became actively involved in this stylisation as they searched for individuality and self-expression.

Bringing ethnohistory and multimodality together has provided a way of connecting the semiotic choices in bookplates to the traditions of Edwardian society. This has been particularly important for layout composition, as it has enabled bookplates to be analysed in terms of Kress and van Leeuwen's concepts of information value, salience and framing, while linking these concepts to provenance (what the mode has been repeatedly used to mean and do over time) and social conventions. For example, while book owners had a certain freedom in their choices of image, colour, typography and materiality, they recognised the importance of adhering to traditional standards of layout composition and continuing the well-established structure that had existed for hundreds of years. This meant that bookplates were not only created with an awareness of what it was possible to express and represent with the meaning resources available, but also with a recognition of the boundaries of social acceptability and the various cultural, social and historical ways in which meaning could be made through particular semiotic choices. As a result, all bookplates were pasted on the centre of the front endpaper – the same place that they had been pasted for more than three hundred years prior.

Combining the tools of visual social semiotics with archival records has also helped to emphasise not only that the meanings associated with bookplates are rooted in a particular

historical or social context, but also that their meanings can shift over time. Considering particular semiotic choices within the affordances of the Edwardian period is essential for recognising their significance. For example, the types of furnishings displayed in the upper-class bookplate and the use of copperplate paper were strongly bound up with wealth and social status. Nowadays, in a society in which most items are mass-produced, we may take these choices for granted and fail to acknowledge their symbolic importance for Edwardians.

Another benefit of the co-application of ethnohistory and multimodality is its ability to highlight the ways in which meaning can be assigned to a text based on the internal norms within genres or sub-genres. The analysis has highlighted that while the four examples belong to the overarching category of ‘bookplate’, they all bear individual differences in design that are strongly linked to genre conventions. This can be noted most explicitly in the armorial example, whereby its semiotic choices are governed principally by the rules of heraldry as opposed to the rules of visual grammar. These findings suggest that it may be beneficial to combine relevant elements of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) framework with a text’s canons of use. This will ensure that visual grammar’s system of description does not obscure or have priority over internal motivations that may have influenced a text’s structure or design choice.

This combined approach offers a new way to carry out the analysis of historical artefacts. In particular, it has demonstrated how situating choices of image, colour, typography and materiality in the broader sociocultural and political context of the Edwardian era can reveal the ways in which bookplates objectified their owners’ economic means and cultural necessities, while also acting as internalised representations of class divisions and social mobility in Edwardian Britain. While these underlying meanings would not have come to light without an archival investigation into the bookplate owners, they equally would not have emerged without the tools of multimodality that help to situate bookplates in their wider communicational landscape. By locating semiotic choices within the cultural codes of a particular group, multimodal ethnohistorical approaches achieve more in-depth analyses that go beyond the viewpoints offered by any one methodology alone. Given the relative neglect of the potential benefits of their co-application, multimodal ethnohistorical approaches have vast potential for further development whether to explore historical gender inequality, representations of ethnic minorities or mistreatment of indigenous people. This would mark a significant step towards preventing history from, in Davin’s (cited in Wandor 1972, 216) words, continuing to be “the history of the rulers, and in male dominated society, the history of men.”

## References

- Altick, Richard. 1957. *The English Common Reader*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Axtell, James. 1979. "Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint." *Ethnohistory* 26 (1): 1-13.
- Bailey, Peter. 1999. "White Collars, Gray Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited." *Journal of British Studies* 38: 273-90.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- Barton, David, and Uta Papen. 2010. *The Anthropology of Writing*. London: Continuum.
- Bateman, J. 2008. *Multimodality and Genre*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bateman, John, Judy Delin, and Renate Henschel. 2004. "Multimodality and empiricism: preparing for a corpus-based approach to the study of multimodal meaning-making." In: *Perspectives on Multimodality*, edited by Eija Ventola, Cassily Charles, and Martin Kaltenbacher, 65-87. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bezemer, Jeff, and Carey Jewitt. 2010. "Multimodal analysis: key issues." In: *Research Methods in Linguistics*, edited by Lia Litosseliti, 180-197, London: Continuum.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2010. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Chartier, Roger. 2002. "The Practical Impact of Writing." In: *The Book History Reader*, edited by David Finklestein, and Alistair McCleery, 118-142. London: Routledge.
- Crossick, Geoffrey. 1977. *Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914*. Croom Helm Ltd: London.
- Djonov, Emilia, and Theo van Leeuwen, 2011. "The semiotics of texture: from tactile to visual." *Written Communication* 10 (4): 541-564.
- Durie, Mark. 1997. "Reading images: the grammar of visual design, by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen: review." *English in Australia* 119: 92.
- Entwistle, Dorothy. 1990. "Children's Reward Books in Non-Conformist Sunday Schools, 1870-1914: Occurrence, Nature and Purpose." Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Lancaster.
- Faudree, Paja, and Magnus Pharao Hansen. 2013. "Language, society and history: Towards a unified approach?" In: *Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by N.J. Enfield, Paul Kockelman, and Jack Sidnell, 227-249, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gillen, Julia. 2013. "Writing Edwardian Postcards." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17 (4): 488-521.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.



- Halliday, Michael. 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Hammond, Mary. 2006. *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Hardy, William. 1897. *Book-Plates*. Alexandria: Library of Alexandria.
- Hymes, Dell. 1962. "The Ethnography of Speaking." In *Anthropology and Human Behavior*, edited by T. Gladwin, and William Sturtevant, 13-53, Washington DC: Anthropology Society of Washington.
- Jaffe, Alexandra. 1999. "Packaged sentiments: The social meaning of greeting cards." *Journal of Material Culture* 4: 115–141.
- Johnson, Dick. 2000. "Left vs. Right, *The E-Sylum*" [online] 3(15) Accessed June 13 2018 [http://www.coinbooks.org/esylum\\_v03n15a05.html](http://www.coinbooks.org/esylum_v03n15a05.html)
- Katriel, Tamar. 2015. "Expanding Ethnography of Communication Research." *Communication Theory* 25: 454-459.
- Kettle, Keri, and Gerald Häubl. 2011. "The Signature Effect: Signing Influences Consumption-Related Behavior by Priming Self-Identity." *Journal of Consumer Research* 38 (3): 474-489.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. 1996. *Reading Images - The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. 2002. "Colour as a Semiotic Mode: Notes for a Grammar of Colour." *Visual Communication* 1 (3): 348-368.
- Laurier, Eric, and Angus Whyte. 2001. "'I saw you': Searching for lost love via practices of reading, writing and responding." *Sociological Research Online* 6 (1): 1-10.
- Lenders, Rob, and Ingo Janssen. 2014. "The Grass Snake and the Basilisk: from pre-Christian Protective House God to the Antichrist." *Environment and History* 20: 319-346.
- Lerer, Seth. 2012. "Devotion and Defacement: Reading Children's Marginalia." *Representations* 118 (2): 126-153.
- Machin, David. 2007. *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Masterman, Charles. 1909. *The Condition of England*. London: Methuen.
- O'Hagan, Lauren. 2015. "Multimodality in Edwardian Bookplates: The Rediscovery of a Lost Art." Unpublished MA thesis, Cardiff University.
- O'Halloran, Kay, Sabine Tan, Peter Wignell, John Bateman, Duc-Son Pham, Michele Grossman and Andrew Vande Moere, A. 2016. Interpreting text and image relations in violent extremist discourse: A mixed methods approach for big data analytics. *Terrorism and Political Violence* [online] Accessed June 13 2018

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2016.1233871> [Accessed: 17 March 2018].

Pahl, Kate, and Jennifer Rowsell. 2006. *Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Pearson, David. 1998. *Provenance Research in Book History*. London: The British Library.

Plotz, John. 2008. *Portable Property*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rosch, Eleanor. 1975. "Cognitive reference points." *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (4): 532–547.

Rose, Jonathan. 2010. *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sawhney, Paramvir. 2006. *The Pre-Raphaelite Body* [online] Accessed June 13 2018 <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/prb/sawhney.html>

Scott, Temple. 1902. "The Artistic Bookplate." In *Bookplates of Today*, edited by Wilbur Macey Stone, 20–38, New York: Donnele & Co.

Sheehan, Bernard. 1969. "Indian-White Relations in Early America." *William and Mary Quarterly* 26: 267–286.

Tagg, John. 1988. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

The Bookplate Society. 2008. *An Overview of Principal Styles of Bookplates in Britain 1600–2000*. [online] Accessed June 13 2018 <http://www.bookplatesociety.org/styles.html>

Thompson, Tommy. 1965. *Script Lettering for Artists*. New York: Dover Publications.

Thomson, Pat. 2016. *Educational Leadership and Pierre Bourdieu*. London: Routledge.

van Leeuwen, Theo. 2005. *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London: Routledge.

van Leeuwen, Theo. 2006. "Towards a Semiotic of Typography." *Information Design Journal* 14 (1): 139–155.

van Leeuwen, Theo. 2011. *The Language of Colour: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

van Leeuwen, Theo, and Carey Jewitt. 2000. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications.

Vanrigh, Anny Crunelle. 2009. "Illuminations, Heraldry and King Edward III," *Word and Image* 25 (3): 215–231.

Velde, François. 2000. *Heraldic Atlas* [online] Accessed June 13 2018 <http://www.heraldica.org/topics/glossary/atlas.htm>

Wandor, Michelene. 1972. *The Body Politic: Women's Liberation in Britain 1969-72*. London: Stage 1.

Wild, Jonathan. 2006. *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture, 1880-1939*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Zakia, Richard. 2007. *Perception and Imaging*. Waltham: Focal Press.