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NETWORKS OF MEANING, ECOLOGIES OF WAR: ACTOR–NETWORK THEORY AND SOCIAL SEMIOTICS IN *YELLOW BUTTERFLY: A STORY FROM UKRAINE*

МЕРЕЖІ ЗНАЧЕНЬ, ЕКОЛОГІЇ ВІЙНИ: АКТОРНО-МЕРЕЖЕВА ТЕОРІЯ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНА СЕМІОТИКА У КНИЗІ “ЖОВТИЙ МЕТЕЛИК. ІСТОРІЯ З УКРАЇНИ”

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Abstract. This study examines Oleksandr Shatokhin’s wordless picturebook *Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine* through an integrated framework combining Actor–Network Theory (ANT) and multimodal social semiotics. Focusing on the representation of war, trauma, and resilience, the study moves beyond approaches that interpret nonhuman elements merely as symbolic devices and explores how human and more-than-human actors participate in the production of meaning. Drawing on the ANT concepts of *actant*, *translation*, and *network*, the analysis conceptualizes the yellow butterfly not simply as a metaphor of hope but as an active participant whose agency emerges through relations with the child protagonist, the devastated landscape, material objects, visual resources, cultural memory, and the reader.

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative multimodal analysis organized according to Callon’s stages of translation: *problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization* (1986) These stages reveal how the butterfly initially interrupts a visual network dominated by destruction and confinement, gradually establishes new relations of attention and perception, becomes integrated into a broader assemblage of human and nonhuman actors, and ultimately expands into a collective representation of resilience. Particular attention is given to the role of color, especially yellow, which functions simultaneously as a visual resource, an affective force, and a culturally situated sign connected with Ukrainian landscapes, national identity, and collective memory.

The findings demonstrate that the picture book's ideological meanings are not fixed messages transmitted through images but emerge through dynamic interactions among color, composition, materiality, natural entities, human experiences, and cultural contexts. By combining ANT with multimodal social semiotics, the study proposes an understanding of the picture book as an active assemblage in which agency is distributed across networks of human and nonhuman participants. *Yellow Butterfly* ultimately presents resilience not as individual recovery alone but as a relational process produced through connections among childhood, nature, material worlds, and collective memory.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory, multimodal social semiotics, wordless picturebook, war narratives, children’s literature, nonhuman agency, Ukrainian identity, color symbolism, materiality.

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INTRODUCTION

War leaves different traces on children's experiences: for some, it is a world in which sirens, ruins, loss, and displacement become part of everyday life; for others, it remains a distant horizon encountered through images, words, and stories. For the former, war is the reality in which they grow up; for the latter, it is a reality that reaches them from afar. Narrative cannot erase the distance between these experiences. A picture book may convey images, emotions, and testimonies of war, but it cannot reproduce the lived condition of a child who experiences it. It can, however, bring this distant reality into view and create opportunities for observation, interpretation, and reflection through images, colors, spaces, objects, gestures, and the sequence of pages.

This distinction is important and reflects broader research in children's literature on how picture books approach complex experiences through the interaction of verbal and visual modes. Many picture books about war employ age-appropriate multimodal narratives that create possibilities for empathy, ethical reflection, and historical understanding (Kaliakatsou & Giannikopoulou, 2014, p. 670; Nikolajeva, 2014, pp. 85–86). Research has also shown that violence need not be represented directly. Color, composition, spatial organization, visual metaphor, silence, and the book's material design can convey the intensity and consequences of war (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 179; Serafini, 2014, pp. 44–45). Meaning may therefore emerge through what remains unseen or unsaid, requiring readers to connect and interpret fragmented landscapes, shifting perspectives, and recurring motifs (Giannicopoulou & Kaliakatsou, 2013, p. 135). Contemporary picture books about war also attend to the ecological and material worlds affected by war. Animals, insects, plants, landscapes, buildings, and everyday objects may participate in narratives of destruction and renewal, foregrounding the entanglement of human and more-than-human worlds (Moshenska, 2019, p. 1).

Yet, despite extensive scholarship on war picture books, less attention has been given to how meaning emerges through relations among human figures, non-human entities, objects, visual resources, and the material book. Non-human elements, in particular, are often approached as metaphors or symbolic devices, with less attention given to their role in shaping meaning. Despite substantial scholarship on war picture books, existing research has predominantly focused on trauma, memory, peace education, emotional development, visual metaphor, and multimodal storytelling (Nikolajeva, 2014; Serafini, 2014). Comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining how ideological meanings are materially produced through the relationships among human figures, nonhuman entities, objects, visual resources, and the physical book itself. Nonhuman elements are interpreted as metaphors or symbolic devices rather than as participants in the production of meaning. This limitation highlights the need for analytical approaches that examine both representation and how meaning develops through heterogeneous relations.

Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine, written and illustrated by Ukrainian artist Oleksandr Shatokhin and published in Ukraine in 2022, before its English-language edition in 2023, provides a productive site for such an investigation. The wordless picture book follows a child through a landscape of barbed wire, destruction, military violence, and displacement, while a yellow butterfly becomes a recurring presence. As the narrative unfolds, yellow and blue gradually enter the predominantly black-and-white visual field, expanding it and creating a sense of openness. This choice can be considered in relation to the way Shatokhin describes the significance of the book: "This is what my book is about. About light after darkness." His personal account connects the images with his experience of war and its consequences, as he states: "I saw with my own eyes the destroyed homes, the troops of the occupiers, the frightened migrants forced to leave their homes." He also refers to the strength and unity that he observes among Ukrainians: "I see the strength and unity of Ukrainians in this struggle every day." He further clarifies that these experiences and emotions are part of the book: "It is also depicted in the book – all those feelings and emotions are in there" (Let's Talk Picture Books, 2023).

In *Yellow Butterfly*, the child, the butterfly, barbed wire, destroyed buildings, military objects, landscapes, colors, and the surfaces of the pages form a changing network of relations. Their positions and movements influence how the war is perceived. Actor-Network Theory (ANT), developed by Latour, Callon, and Law, helps examine these relations by understanding agency as relational and distributed among human and non-human actors (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005; Law, 2009). Non-human entities function as actants insofar as their relations modify other actors and contribute to the production of meaning (Latour, 2005, p. 46).

Multimodal social semiotics complements this perspective by focusing on the visual resources through which these relations become perceptible. Color, line, scale, framing, spatial distribution, repetition, movement, contrast, and sequencing organize meaning across the double-page spreads. The restricted color palette is particularly significant: the gradual appearance and expansion of yellow and blue are not examined as isolated symbols, but as part of a changing semiotic organization in relation to the child's body, the damaged environment, and the development of the narrative.

Drawing on this combined perspective, the present study examines how the child, the butterfly, damaged landscapes, material objects, color, light, silence, spatial composition, and the material page participate in the formation of trauma, transformation, and hope. Attention is given to the child's interaction with damaged environments and material obstacles, the butterfly's changing role, the transition from monochrome to color, and the transformation of visual space. The analysis therefore focuses not on individual symbols but on the changing relations through which meanings and their effects emerge within the book's visual network.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative multimodal analysis informed by Actor–Network Theory (ANT) and multimodal social semiotics. Rather than

applying Callon's (1986, pp. 204–216) four moments of *translation* – *problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization* – as chronological stages, this study adapts them as interpretative lenses for examining relational transformations within the picture book assemblage. Although originally developed to analyze sociotechnical controversies, the concept of translation offers a productive heuristic for literary analysis because it enables the examination of how heterogeneous actors become connected, acquire significance, and participate in the construction of meaning. The four moments of translation therefore guide the analysis of how the butterfly emerges within a wartime network, reorganizes relations among human, nonhuman, and material actors, and contributes to broader configurations of trauma, resilience, and cultural memory. Within this integrated framework, multimodal social semiotics explains how visual resources such as color, composition, spatial organization, and material design communicate meaning, and ANT reveals how these resources function as relational forces that participate in networks of meaning production.

ACTANTS, TRANSLATION, AND RELATIONAL AGENCY IN THE MULTIMODAL PICTUREBOOK

Actor-Network Theory (ANT), developed through the theoretical contributions of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, offers a significant reorientation of how agency, action, and meaning-making are understood. Emerging from science and technology studies, ANT challenges approaches that explain social and cultural phenomena exclusively through human intentions, beliefs, or representations. Instead, it proposes that actions and meanings are produced through networks of relations among heterogeneous human and nonhuman entities. These entities may include people, objects, technologies, materials, images, texts, and symbolic forms, which become significant as they modify the actions and relations of other actors (Latour, 2005, p. 46).

The central concept of the *actant* enables ANT to move beyond a human-centered understanding of agency. Unlike traditional approaches that associate agency with conscious subjects, ANT defines an actant as any entity capable of producing an effect within a network. Agency, therefore, is not understood as a possession but as a relational achievement that emerges through associations among different actors (Latour, 2005, p. 71). An actant does not act because it possesses intention or independent power; rather, it acts because it participates in a configuration of relations through which something is transformed. As Latour (2005, p. 71) emphasizes, the question is not whether a particular entity has agency in isolation, but what differences it produces within a network of interactions.

This perspective is particularly productive for analyzing contemporary picture books, where meaning is not generated solely by authors, illustrators, or readers but through interactions among multiple material and semiotic elements. In a wordless

picture book such as Oleksandr Shatokhin's *Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine*, the visual elements themselves participate in meaning-making processes. The yellow butterfly, the child figure, the destroyed landscape, color contrasts, textures, page composition, and the reader's interpretive activity form a heterogeneous network in which meaning and agency emerge relationally. From an ANT perspective, the butterfly should therefore not be interpreted merely as a symbolic representation of hope created by human intention. Rather, it functions as an actant because it reorganizes relations within the picture book assemblage by redirecting attention, transforming perception, and connecting different experiences of trauma, memory, and resilience.

The concept of the *network* is equally fundamental to ANT. However, a network is not understood as a fixed structure containing predetermined relationships. Instead, it refers to a dynamic process of association through which different actors become connected and through which meanings are continuously negotiated (Latour, 2005, p. 131). Networks are therefore unstable achievements that require ongoing maintenance and reinforcement. Law (2009, p. 141) describes this approach as material semiotics because social and cultural realities are produced through relations among meanings, materials, bodies, and practices. In this sense, a picture book can be understood as a material-semiotic network in which visual forms and material elements do not merely represent ideas but actively participate in producing experiences and interpretations.

The ANT concept of *mediation* further clarifies the role of nonhuman actors within networks. For Latour (2005, pp. 39, 108), mediators do not simply carry meanings produced elsewhere; they can alter, redirect, and reshape what they convey. Instead, mediators transform, translate, and modify the relations they connect. This distinction is crucial for understanding the role of visual elements in picture books. The butterfly does not simply transmit a pre-existing message of hope; through its color, movement, and placement within the composition, it transforms the relationship between the child and the surrounding environment. Similarly, the page's materiality does not simply contain the narrative but contributes to how trauma and transformation are experienced.

A central process through which networks are formed is *translation*, a concept developed particularly by Callon (1986, p. 224). In ANT, translation does not refer to linguistic conversion but to the process through which actors define problems, negotiate identities, establish relationships, and create networks of association. Translation describes how an actor attempts to organize a field of possibilities by connecting different interests and actors around a particular configuration. From an ANT perspective, meaning does not already exist and get communicated; instead, it emerges through negotiation and mediation. Callon (1986, p. 204–216) identifies four interconnected moments within translation: *problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization*. These stages describe how actors become connected within a network and how particular relations become temporarily stabilized. In the

context of *Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine*, translation provides a framework for examining how the butterfly moves from an isolated visual presence to a central actant within a broader network of childhood experience, war trauma, ecological imagination, cultural memory, and collective resilience.

Problematization refers to the moment when an actor defines a situation and establishes itself as an obligatory passage point (OPP) through which other actors must pass to achieve transformation (Callon, 1986, pp. 204–205). The obligatory passage point is not a form of domination but a position of relational importance within a network. An actor becomes central because it creates a pathway through which different actors and possibilities become connected.

In *Yellow Butterfly*, the butterfly's emergence can be understood as a moment of problematization because it introduces a new possibility within a network initially dominated by destruction and confinement. The child's world is structured by the material consequences of war: damaged environments, threatening objects, restrictive spaces, and visual signs of violence. These nonhuman elements are not merely background representations but active participants that shape the possibilities available to the child. The butterfly becomes significant because it establishes another pathway through which the child and reader can encounter this environment differently. It does not remove trauma; rather, it reorganizes the relations surrounding trauma.

The second stage, *interessement*, concerns the processes through which an actor attracts and stabilizes the participation of other actors within a network (Callon, 1986, pp. 207–211). Interessement involves creating connections by redirecting attention and interrupting previous configurations. In visual narratives, this process occurs through the interaction of semiotic resources that guide perception and interpretation.

The butterfly's bright yellow color attracts attention within the predominantly dark visual environment. Its significance emerges through contrast and relation rather than through an isolated symbolic meaning. The butterfly becomes powerful because it interrupts the established visual order and creates a new center of attention. Through this process, it connects the child, the reader, and the visual environment within a different network of relations.

Enrolment refers to the process through which actors acquire roles and become integrated into the network (Callon, 1986, pp. 211–214). Within ANT, roles are not fixed characteristics but are produced through interactions. An actor becomes meaningful through the position it occupies within a network of relationships. In *Yellow Butterfly*, the butterfly's agency depends on its associations with the child, the landscape, material objects, and the reader.

The child is not represented as an isolated individual overcoming trauma through personal strength alone. Instead, transformation emerges through connections with other actors. The landscape, damaged objects, visual forms, and material elements of the book participate in this process. The destruction surrounding the child becomes part of a transformed network where memory and imagination produce new

possibilities. This understanding reflects ANT's rejection of a strict separation between active human subjects and passive objects. Meaning emerges through interactions among heterogeneous actors.

The final stage, *mobilization*, concerns the expansion and circulation of a network beyond the immediate situation in which it is formed (Callon, 1986, pp. 214–216). Through mobilization, actors become connected to broader collectives and meanings. In *Yellow Butterfly*, this process is represented through the transformation of the single butterfly into multiple butterflies. The butterfly moves from an individual encounter toward a collective formation, connecting personal experience with wider narratives of resilience and cultural memory.

From an ANT perspective, such meanings are not predetermined messages embedded within the image. Instead, they emerge through networks involving the artwork, historical context, readers, educational practices, and cultural circulation. The butterfly becomes a travelling actant whose significance continues to develop through new encounters with different audiences and contexts.

While ANT explains how agency circulates among heterogeneous actors, multimodal social semiotics provides the analytical framework for examining how these relations become visually and materially constructed. Developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, multimodal social semiotics argues that meaning is produced through multiple modes, including color, composition, spatial organization, gaze, typography, gesture, and material design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Images are therefore not passive illustrations of verbal meanings but structured systems through which social, emotional, and cultural meanings are produced.

The combination of ANT and multimodal semiotics is particularly valuable for analyzing wordless picture books because these works depend on complex interactions among visual and material elements. Without written narration, meaning emerges through relationships among image, page, sequence, and reader interpretation. As Serafini (2014, p. 2, 12) argues, contemporary picture book reading requires attention to the ways visual elements organize interpretation and invite participation.

From this perspective, color, line, texture, and spatial composition can be understood as active participants within the picture book network. They do not simply communicate meanings established elsewhere; they contribute meaning through their relations with other actors. The yellow butterfly's significance, for example, emerges through its interaction with darkness, spatial positioning, the child's gaze, and the reader's visual movement through the pages.

Therefore, integrating ANT with multimodal social semiotics allows *Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine* to be approached as a dynamic assemblage rather than a closed representation. The butterfly, the child, the material page, visual modes, and readers collectively participate in constructing meanings of trauma, transformation, and resilience. The analytical question is how the butterfly acts within the network of relations that the picture book creates.

THE YELLOW BUTTERFLY AS AN ACTANT: ACTOR–NETWORK THEORY AND MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

Unlike approaches that locate agency exclusively within intentional human subjects, ANT understands agency as relational: an entity becomes an *actant* through its capacity to modify relations and produce effects within a network (Latour, 2005, p. 74). and the materiality of the page.

Problematization: The Butterfly as an Obligatory Passage Point

Before the butterfly's emergence, the picture book's visual network is dominated by destruction, restriction, and uncertainty. The child exists within an environment shaped by the material consequences of war: damaged structures, threatening objects, fragmented landscapes, and oppressive spatial formations.

From an ANT perspective, these elements are not passive illustrations of violence. They shape the possibilities available to the human actors within the narrative. The ruins, military traces, and fragmented spaces create a network in which movement and agency appear limited. The child's small scale in relation to the surrounding environment visually communicates the imbalance between human vulnerability and the overwhelming material presence of war.

The multimodal construction of this network is reinforced through color and texture. The early pages rely on a restricted palette of black, grey, and white. This chromatic absence produces an atmosphere of enclosure and emotional restriction. The darkness does not simply symbolize sadness; it creates a visual environment in which possibilities appear reduced. Sharp lines, dense hatching, and fragmented forms function as visual barriers, limiting movement across the page and reproducing the experience of a world fractured by violence.

Within this configuration, the yellow butterfly appears as a disruptive actant. A particularly characteristic spread illustrates how visual composition orchestrates the transition from fear to hope through the strategic deployment of salience, vectors, and color. The **yellow butterfly** positioned on the right-hand page constitutes the most **salient** visual element in the entire composition. Its luminous yellow hue stands in stark contrast to the dense, circular black background, immediately attracting the reader's gaze and establishing it as the focal point of meaning. This contrast is reinforced by the relationship between the two facing pages. While the left-hand page is rendered entirely in monochrome, visually communicating fear, vulnerability, and destruction, the right-hand page introduces the only colored element. The butterfly's appearance therefore marks the emergence of hope from within darkness, transforming color into a powerful semiotic resource.

On the left-hand page, the girl's raised arms, shielding her face, generate defensive **vectors** that visually communicate withdrawal, protection, and resistance to the surrounding violence. By contrast, the right-hand page is organized around a

dense network of converging black lines that function as powerful **vectors**, directing the viewer's attention toward the center of the composition. At this focal point, the yellow butterfly appears to pierce the surrounding darkness, disrupting the enclosed circular space and symbolically opening a pathway from confinement and trauma toward hope, renewal, and possibility.

However, the meaning of yellow in *Yellow Butterfly* is not limited to a universal association with happiness or hope. Within Ukrainian cultural semiotics, yellow carries specific historical and national meanings. The cultural agency of yellow in *Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine* is further intensified through its connection with Ukrainian collective memory and landscape imagination. Within Ukrainian cultural symbolism, the combination of blue and yellow extends beyond national identification to evoke a profound relationship between land, agricultural heritage, and historical continuity. The image of golden fields beneath the open blue sky functions as a visual memory of homeland, a landscape repeatedly threatened and reimagined through histories of displacement and war. From the perspective of cultural memory (Assmann, 2011, pp. 111–116), the butterfly activates not only an individual experience of trauma but also a collective repertoire of meanings associated with survival, belonging, and renewal. Therefore, the butterfly operates as a cultural-material actant that connects personal suffering with broader narratives of Ukrainian identity, resilience, and ecological regeneration.

From an ANT perspective, Ukrainian cultural meaning is not simply conveyed through color; it is assembled through relations among the butterfly, the visual composition, historical memory, national symbolism, and the reader’s cultural knowledge. Yellow becomes an active mediator connecting individual trauma with collective identity. The butterfly therefore functions simultaneously as a visual element, a cultural sign, and a relational actant.

Interessement: Redirecting Attention and Reconfiguring Relations

In *Yellow Butterfly*, *interessement* occurs through the butterfly’s ability to reorganize visual and interpretative relations within the assemblage. It becomes an actant because it produces changes in the relationships among the child, the environment, and other elements of the picture book.

The spread foregrounds the transformative role of color and compositional organization in visualizing recovery and renewal. The **yellow** palette dominates almost the entire right-hand page, where the expansive field of luminous butterflies visually outweighs the receding black background. As darkness is confined to the margins, the composition suggests that trauma is gradually losing its hold, allowing hope to occupy the visual center. On the left-hand page, the girl remains depicted through delicate white contour lines, preserving the visual memory of vulnerability. However, she is now encircled by a radiant spiral of yellow butterflies, establishing a

visual connection between her present state and the hopeful future represented on the opposite page.

The spread is further organized through dynamic **vectors** that guide the reading path across the composition. On the left, the ascending spiral of butterflies forms a powerful **vector** that rises from beneath the girl's body and curves upward, visually expressing emotional uplift, resilience, and movement beyond the immediate reality of war. On the right, countless small yellow butterflies merge into a dense luminous formation that functions as a collective visual force rather than a series of isolated figures. Simultaneously, the girl's gaze is directed toward the right-hand page, generating a **vector** of attention that leads the reader from the **Given** past toward the **New** horizon of hope, where color, movement, and light converge to symbolize the possibility of healing and renewal.

The reader is also drawn into this network. Because the book contains no written narration, interpretation depends on following visual relations among color, movement, objects, and characters. The butterfly functions as a guide within this silent narrative system, connecting separate moments and enabling readers to construct continuity.

Through interessement, the butterfly begins to reorganize the war network. Destruction remains visible, but it becomes connected to new possibilities of remembering and reconstruction. The butterfly does not erase suffering; instead, it creates a different relationship with suffering.

Enrolment: Constructing a Multimodal Network of Transformation

In *Yellow Butterfly*, enrolment occurs through the transformation of relationships among the child, material objects, landscape, and visual elements.

The particularly powerful spread near the end of the book conveys change by reconfiguring one of its most significant visual motifs: the barbed wire. At the beginning of the narrative, the barbed wire is depicted with heavy, jagged black lines against a dark background, functioning as an oppressive physical and psychological barrier that embodies entrapment, fear, and the violence of war. In this final spread, however, it has been stripped of its threatening agency. The once-hostile barbed wire is reconfigured as a series of thin horizontal lines that no longer divide or imprison space but instead serve as delicate perches upon which yellow butterflies rest or prepare to take flight. Through this visual transformation, an instrument of confinement is reimagined as a support for life and renewal.

The color composition reinforces this symbolic reversal. Darkness gives way to a luminous blue background, while vivid yellow butterflies emerge as the most prominent visual elements. Together, the blue sky and the yellow butterflies evoke the colors of the Ukrainian national flag, signifying peace, resilience, and cultural identity. Nature gradually reclaims the landscape, visually displacing the remnants of warfare and suggesting that life has begun to overcome destruction.

The composition is further organized through the butterflies, whether perched or ascending from these lines, which generate upward **vectors** that direct the reader's gaze toward the upper part of the page, where movement, openness, and light collectively symbolize liberation, hope, and the possibility of a future beyond war.

The child's agency does not emerge independently but through connections with other actants. The butterfly, the page, the damaged environment, and the reader participate in reshaping her position within the narrative. Agency is therefore distributed across the network rather than located exclusively within the human subject.

The contrast between black and yellow demonstrates this relational process. Darkness creates the conditions through which yellow becomes powerful, while yellow simultaneously transforms the meaning of darkness. Meaning is produced through interaction rather than contained within individual symbols.

Mobilization: From Individual Butterfly to Collective Resilience

The *mobilization* process appears through the transformation of the single butterfly into a collective presence. The multiplication of butterflies shifts the narrative from individual survival toward collective resilience.

The final spread presents a profound chromatic transformation in which color becomes a vehicle of national identity and collective recovery. The black tones that previously dominated the visual landscape as symbols of war and devastation have disappeared entirely. In their place, the composition is organized into two expansive chromatic fields: a brilliant blue sky occupying the upper zone and a luminous yellow landscape extending across the lower zone. Together, these two-color planes evoke the Ukrainian national flag, visually communicating not only cultural identity but also the restoration of hope and the possibility of renewal. The human figures remain rendered in white outline, yet their meaning has shifted. Rather than signifying vulnerability and fear, the white contours now convey innocence, resilience, and the moral vindication of those who have endured the violence of war.

The composition also reflects a significant transformation in social relations through its organization of space and interpersonal representation. On the left-hand page, the girl is no longer isolated within darkness but is accompanied by other children and adults. This transition from solitude to community suggests that healing and reconstruction emerge through collective solidarity rather than individual endurance. By contrast, the right-hand page centers on a single figure facing the open horizon. Surrounded by extensive **negative space**, the figure is within an expansive landscape that conveys openness, tranquility, and possibility. The visual progression from the shared experience of survival to the contemplation of an unrestricted horizon symbolizes the recovery of freedom and the emergence of a future no longer defined by war but by hope and new beginnings.

The butterfly therefore becomes a travelling actant. Through translations, educational uses, international circulation, and scholarly interpretations, it continues to generate meanings beyond the book's physical boundaries. Each encounter with the picture book renews the network.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that *Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine* constructs its anti-war discourse through a dynamic network of human, nonhuman, material, and visual actants rather than through verbal narration alone. By integrating Actor–Network Theory with multimodal social semiotics, the analysis reveals that meaning emerges relationally through the interactions among the child protagonist, the yellow butterfly, ruined landscapes, barbed wire, color, light, spatial organization, and the material page. Within this network, the butterfly functions not merely as a symbolic representation of hope but as an actant that continuously reconfigures relationships, redirects visual attention, and mediates the transformation of fear into resilience.

The analysis further illustrates that ideological meanings are not embedded in isolated images but are assembled through evolving multimodal networks. Colour shifts from monochrome darkness to the blue-and-yellow palette associated with Ukraine; compositional structures move from enclosure to openness; and material elements such as barbed wire are reconfigured from instruments of confinement into supports for life. Together, these changes shape a narrative in which humans, non-human life, and material environments are implicated in shared experiences of trauma, recovery, and renewal. The combined ANT–social semiotic framework therefore extends existing scholarship on war picture books by foregrounding the distributed agency of visual and material elements in the production of meaning. Beyond documenting the realities of war, *Yellow Butterfly* invites readers to perceive it as a relational condition that reaches across interconnected human and more-than-human worlds. In doing so, the picture book becomes more than a testimony to the wounds of violence: it opens a space where care, coexistence, and collective resilience allow hope to take root and light to return.

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У цьому дослідженні проаналізовано безтекстову книжку-картинку Олександра Шатохіна *"Жовтий метелик: Історія з України"* крізь призму інтегрованої теоретичної рамки, що поєднує теорію акторно-мережевих взаємодій (Actor–Network Theory, ANT) та мультимодальну соціальну семіотику. Зосереджуючись на репрезентації війни, травми та стійкості, дослідження виходить за межі підходів, які розглядають "не-людські" елементи лише як символічні засоби, висвітлює, як людські та більше-ніж-людські актори беруть участь у творенні значення. Спираючись на ключові поняття ANT – актант, трансляцію та мережу, – авторка розглядає жовтого метелика не просто як метафору надії, а як активного учасника, чия агентність формується через взаємини з дитиною-протагоністом, спустошеним ландшафтом, матеріальними об'єктами, візуальними ресурсами, культурною пам'яттю та читачем.

Методологічно дослідження ґрунтується на якісному мультимодальному аналізі, організованому відповідно до чотирьох етапів трансляції, запропонованих Мішелем Каллоном (1986): проблематизації, зацікавлення (interessement), залучення (enrolment) та мобілізації. Ці етапи демонструють, як метелик спочатку перериває візуальну мережу, що перебуває під домінуванням руйнування та замкненості, поступово формує нові зв'язки уваги й сприйняття, інтегрується в ширший асамбляж людських і "не-людських" акторів і зрештою перетворюється на колективний образ стійкості. Особливу увагу приділено ролі жовтого кольору, який одночасно функціонує як візуальний ресурс, афективна сила та

культурно зумовлений знак, пов’язаний з українським ландшафтом, національною ідентичністю та колективною пам’яттю.

Результати дослідження показують, що ідеологічні значення книжки-картинки не є фіксованими повідомленнями, які передаються через зображення, а виникають унаслідок динамічної взаємодії кольору, композиції, матеріальності, природних сутностей, людського досвіду та культурних контекстів. Поєднуючи теорію акторно-мережевих взаємодій із мультимодальною соціальною семіотикою, дослідження пропонує розуміти книжки-картинки як активні асамбляжі, у якій агентність розподілена між мережами людських і “не-людських” учасників. Зрештою, *“Жовтий метелик: Історія з України”* репрезентує стійкість не лише як індивідуальне відновлення, а як реляційний процес, що формується через взаємозв’язки між дитинством, природою, матеріальним світом і колективною пам’яттю.

Ключові слова: теорія акторно-мережевих взаємодій, мультимодальна соціальна семіотика, безтекстова книжка-картинка, воєнні наративи, дитяча література, агентність не-людських акторів, українська ідентичність, символіка кольору, матеріальність.

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