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Picturebooks and Mental Illness: Discussions in a Post-COVID Context¹

This article analyses Gro Dahle and Kaia Dahle Nyhus's picturebook *Dagen*, focusing on four crucial double pages. Addressing themes of depression, it provides a unique child's perspective and describes various coping mechanisms, delivering a hopeful message. Utilizing social semiotics and multimodality, it examines verbal and visual elements, aligning with Kress and Van Leeuwen's metafunctions. Beyond literature, it intersects with post-COVID depression research, revealing connections between the two. *Dagen* portrays Po's struggle to connect with their Day, meticulously exploring visual, interpersonal, and textual dimensions. The study extends to post-COVID depression, highlighting its prevalence and contributing factors. In conclusion, the analysis emphasizes the synergy between literature, psychology, and medicine in understanding and addressing contemporary challenges.

Keywords: picturebook, social semiotics, mental illness, post-COVID, multimodality

1. Introduction

For this article, I analyze four double pages from the picturebook *Dagen* (*The Day*) by Gro Dahle and Kaia Dahle Nyhus, namely pages two, twelve, seventeen and twenty. These pages have been chosen not just because of the inspirational impact they have had on the author of this article, but also because they show an array of interesting phenomena that contribute to a better understanding of the book through the lens of multimodal analysis. In addition, the picturebook is interesting because, like many previous books by the Dahle Nyhus family, it tackles difficult topics of everyday life, ones that few authors who write children's literature would choose. Therefore, it is informative to see what the authors' choices were in portraying a child's perspective of an infirmity like depression, as well

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as the coping mechanisms adopted. By doing this, they convey a message of light and optimism that is much needed in the context of today's world.

In the pursuit of a comprehensive analysis, I have elected to adopt the theoretical underpinnings of social semiotics and multimodality, as elucidated by Kress and Van Leeuwen, and their contemporaries (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Jewitt et al. 2016). The term “social semiotics” finds its origins in the seminal work of the linguist Michael A.K. Halliday, expounded in his magnum opus *Language as Social Semiotics* published in 1978 (Maagerø and Tønnessen 2010: 126). This work serves as the foundation upon which Kress and van Leeuwen's research is based (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 41). Central to social semiotics is the assertion that language is inherently functional, transcending its mere communicative function to engage in a broader discourse of meaning (Maagerø and Tønnessen 2010: 129). Kress and van Leeuwen, have delineated three principal modalities – or metafunctions – through which meaning is expressed: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 42–43).

The ideational metafunction, in agreement with Maagerø and Tønnessen (2010), is a panoramic representation of the world external to us and the world within, as language articulates diverse processes and phenomena of reality through a symbolic lexicon, thus intricately configuring our corporeal and cognitive experiences. Within this “rich tapestry” of semiotic potential, the interpersonal metafunction signifies meaning exchange, unraveling the intricate threads of social interaction and discourse. As Maagerø and Tønnessen (2010: 139) assert, the textual metafunction, embodying “language as a message,” manifests itself through the nuanced interplay of thematic and coherence patterns, conjuring a profound orchestration of meaning within the text. In this paper, the author employs a medley of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar components (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006).

The ideational aspects find their resonance in narrative and conceptual representation, coupled with astute realizations of vectors. The interpersonal realm is navigated with regard to the gaze and perspective, while the textual terrain is concerned with information value, meaning division, expansion, depth, and framing. An adoption of the definition of multimodal text, articulated as “a text that extracts meaning from several semiotic resources such as speech, verbal text, image, color, sound, etc.” (Maagerø and Tønnessen 2010: 141), provides a way to examine picturebooks as prime exemplars of multimodal texts ripe for in-depth analysis. This form of analysis views the interplay between verbal text and imagery as paramount semiotic resources, with color selectively incorporated when its contributory role holds paramount significance (Jewitt et al. 2016). The intent of this paper resides in the explication of how these semiotic constituents, situated within the select pages, engender meaning together.

In addition to the above, psychological and medical research papers that deal with post-COVID depression are referred to with the aim of broadening the narrative context given by the picturebook, intertwining it with analysis

of a pertinent and contemporaneous event. This is done to highlight important aspects of post-COVID depression with regard to psychology and medicine and its symbiotic resonance with the world evoked in the picturebook.

2. The story

The book tells us about a child named Po who does not get along with their Day from the very beginning (in this context, I will use a capital letter when using the word Day as this is how it is personified in the book). In order to explain the use of the non-binary pronouns, it must be mentioned that Po is another of Kaia Dahle Nyhus' genderless child figures who we meet in her other works, such as *Sjokoladeskurken* (2019) and *Hvorfor det?* (2021). Day wishes Po to seize it, and so does Po's father. He thinks that Po is being lazy and lethargic, but he does not realize that Po's Day already feels overwhelming from the very start – it feels heavy and forceful. Po's Mom believes that Po is being negative, and they get the Day they deserve, but cannot comprehend just how noisy and loud it is. She is not happy with her Day either and it makes her feel tense. Po, on the other hand, just feels empty and does not want their Day at all. The Mom then calls Po's grandmother and invites her over. She brings her Day along and it is beautiful, friendly and beaming with joy – the nicest Day of them all. The two of them are friends, but it is easy to be friends with a Day like that, unlike Po's Day. Grandma tries to talk to Po and offer them advice on how to befriend their Day, but Po thinks that it is impossible to do that. Grandma offers them toys and books, but Po is unable to play and read because of their Day. Then Grandma asks Po to draw, one line at a time and see what happens. If not a line, maybe just a dot. And before they know it, the dot grows wider and wider as Po presses the pen harder and harder into the piece of paper. The hole grows wider and deeper and eventually Day falls into it dragging Po along with it. Grandma tries to reach out to Po, but Po cannot hear her – they have fallen too deep into the darkest darkness. Amidst the shadows, Po finds themselves in an unreachable place together with their Day, now lying in a motionless clump. Po finds themselves seemingly alone in the dark with nothing to hear except the surrounding emptiness. However, they are not alone because the Day is with them. Po catches their breath, finds their inner voice and gathers the strength to ask for help after bringing Day to life. Day reassures them that it is going to be better even though they do not feel well at that moment. It encourages Po to look out for shiny things that make the dark disappear and bring back the sounds. And although it can be a long journey, it is important to take one step at a time. Day helps Po to go towards the light where their parents wait for them in an almost idyllic setting, for there is a great Day ahead for Po.

3. Depression in the post-COVID era

To create a relevant context for the picturebook several articles have been selected in the fields of medicine and psychology that examine the results of studies done on the topic of post-COVID anxiety and depression. Given that the primary field of study does not lie within the mentioned fields, the analysis is restricted to articles pertinent to post-COVID depression.

Since the beginning of the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, the levels of anxiety, depression and PTSD symptoms have been high. “According to the UK COVID Symptom Study, about 10% of patients who have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus continue to be sick beyond 3 weeks, and a smaller percentage for months” (Sher 2021). At the time of the research, this condition was not clearly defined: “It [was] sometimes called ‘post-COVID syndrome’, ‘long COVID’ or ‘post-acute COVID-19 syndrome’ [and] it has been proposed to define post-acute COVID-19 as extending beyond 3 weeks from the onset of first symptoms and chronic COVID-19 as extending beyond 12 weeks” (Sher 2021). A web-survey in Sweden showed that “all post-COVID impairments and fatigue dimensions were significantly associated with depression, anxiety, and insomnia” (Badinlou et al. 2022). Most of the research considered here, as well as the other research referenced within it, shows that there were various elements at play when it came to the severity and manifestation of the symptoms, such as “low household economic levels, deteriorating family relationships, and gender” (Wang et al. 2002). Another study in China on depression, anxiety and post-traumatic growth among COVID-19 survivors six months after discharge, showed that “being female, and having no child were significant background and risk factors of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety” (Xiao et al. 2022). A similar study in the USA claims that the “study results indicate that the rate of serious mental health issues such as depression and anxiety have more than doubled in the USA during the pandemic (i.e. compared to the rates before the pandemic in the year 2019)” (Khubchandani et al. 2001), but that there are “additional key findings from this study that warrant further discussion” which are “the major differences in mental health outcomes based on the sociodemographic characteristics of Americans” (Khubchandani et al. 2001).

In addition to the above, “The important roles of different types of stigma, including perceived discrimination, self-stigma and perceived affiliate stigma” (Xiao et al. 2022) have also been identified in relation to the development and further deepening of the feelings of depression and anxiety. This has been perceived in a way that “the stigma experiences and consequences [...] last even when people have recovered from the infection and may continuously play as fuel of their mental health problems” (Xiao et al. 2002). The same study underlines the factor of hospitalization, showing that being in contact with other patients as well as potentially witnessing their suffering and receiving mental health services during the period

of hospitalization, could have been a major factor in the endurance of mental health issues. Xiao et al. (2002) state that “severe symptoms and exposure to other patients’ suffering may be major traumatic events and can result in PTSD in the long term” and that “it also explains the depressive and anxiety symptoms of COVID-19 survivors after discharge” (Xiao et al. 2002).

As can be seen from these articles, a conclusion can be reached similar to the one stated in the Swedish study, which is that “individuals infected with COVID-19, especially those experiencing post-COVID impairments, are more likely to suffer from mental ill-health and may be more vulnerable for poor mental health outcomes” (Badinlou et al. 2022). By juxtaposing the insights gleaned from these research papers with the narrative world of *Dagen*, I seek to illuminate the symbiotic resonance between personal narratives of struggle and broader socio-cultural discourses on mental health. In synthesizing these diverse strands of inquiry, my aim is to offer a nuanced understanding of how *Dagen* navigates the intricate terrain of childhood depression, offering readers a multifaceted perspective on resilience, coping, and the transformative power of storytelling. Through this interdisciplinary exploration, I hope to shed light on the enduring significance of children’s literature as a site of socio-cultural critique and imaginative engagement and at the same time connect it to a more recent event.

4. Page one: *Smile to the Day and it will smile back*

The first chosen double page (Figure 1) depicts Po and their father who comes to wake Po up. Starting from the ideational metafunction, I will first examine the relationships and representation, as well as the realization of vectors. The representation in the picture is largely naturalistic, quite close to what might be encountered in the real world. Symbolic representation is reflected in the inherent characteristics of the depicted characters, that is, “what the participant means or is” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 105). In the case of this double page, Po and their father are depicted as mirrors of their moods – the father with a smile on his face and cheerful eyes, Po with closed eyes and in a sad mood. The transactional process is unidirectional in this double page, occurring between the father and Po in the sense that the father tries to cheer them up, but Po does not reciprocate the transaction. This is realized through the father’s gaze directed at Po, which is not returned. Po’s vector is directed downward, a paradigm common for feelings of sadness and heaviness. While the father is facing Po, Po has their back turned towards the continuation of the picturebook, and this is a significant vector because Po, as the central figure, refuses to continue the story. These vectors are supported by the text itself, as Day is described as boring, monotonous, and demanding², making it very

² “... maser og tramper og krever.” (Dahle and Dahle Nyhus 2021)

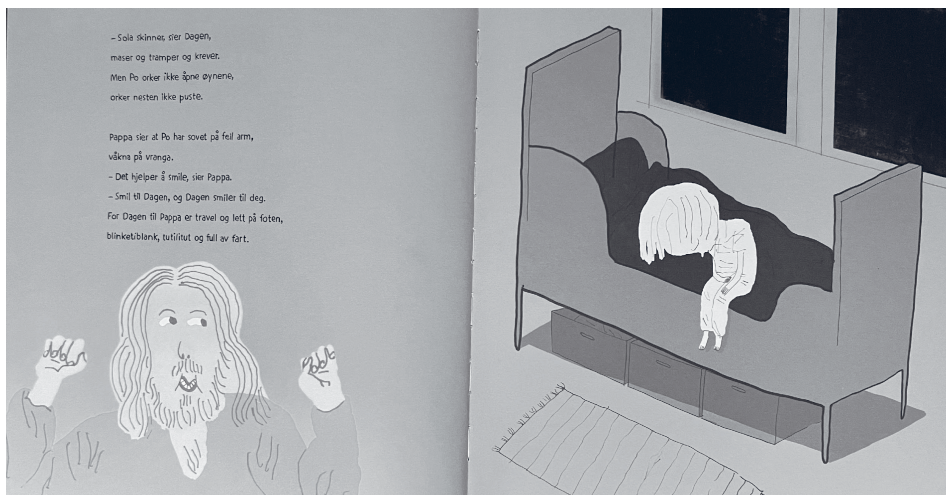


Figure 1. Double page number two

difficult. The specific blue color palette indicates the dark state in which Po finds themselves, while the absence of color in the illustration of Po's character is a clear indication of emotional exhaustion. This is a significant contrast to the illustration of the father's character, who is colored in yellow, the color of the Sun and light. The interpersonal metafunction represents language as the exchange of meaning and thought (Maagerø and Tønnessen 2010: 136) through gaze and perspective, and this is the next step in interpreting the double page. In semiotic resources, this metafunction is manifested through the gaze and perspectives of both the represented participants and the observer, whom Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 114) refer to as the interactive participant. The observer views the scene from a frontal perspective in line with their natural gaze, which corresponds to the naturalistic nature of this representation. Both the observer and the represented participants have access to a complete view of the situation depicted in the double page. The gazes, as mentioned earlier, play an important role in understanding the relationships between the characters and the moods the illustrator is trying to convey to the observer.

Finally, I will also consider the textual metafunction, which is manifested through cohesive and thematically colored messages. Therefore, I will interpret the double page using two paradigms – framing and the known-unknown, as well as the real-unreal paradigm. Framing refers to the presence or absence of elements that frame a part of the picture, thereby connecting it to or separating it from the whole (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 177). The central figure on the right side of the double page is Po, who is surrounded by their environment (furniture and windows). Although the objects surrounding Po are not significant factors for a deeper understanding of the frame, Po as a central figure, shown without

color, representing a void surrounded by dark-colored objects, starkly portrays their mood. The darkness depicted in the color of the bedding and what can (not) be seen through the windows aligns with the text stating that Po “can’t even open their eyes,” further indicating the darkness in which Po finds themselves. While there is no specific line that clearly divides the elements of the page into left-right and up-down, there are indicators that can help the reader to do this. To begin with there is the vertical division, which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) signifies a relationship where the known is located on the left and the unknown on the right (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 179–185; Maagerø and Tønnessen 2010: 148). On the left of this double page, the known side, we have Po’s father and some text. This side, in addition to the known, also signifies security, which would mean that the father is a figure of security. The vectors of his body’s position leads in two directions – one to the right side of the double page through his gaze and head position, and the other upward through the position of his arms. As previously described, on the right side of the double page there is Po, who sits motionless on their bed. The orientation of their body is towards the left, symbolizing a longing for the security which is on the left side, but also reluctance for further adventure, which is typically symbolized by the right side as a realm of uncertainty and adventure (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). In this case, the right side is of great significance because “the right seems to be the side of the key information, of what the reader must pay particular attention to, of the message” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 180). Po’s body is positioned on the imaginary line that divides the page into upper and lower halves, and the position of Po’s head indicates their quest for what lies below. Regarding the up-down paradigm, Kress and van Leuven (2006) state the following: “If, in a visual composition, some of the constituent elements are placed in the upper part, and other different elements in the lower part of the picture space or the page, then what has been placed on the top is presented as the ideal, and what has been placed at the bottom is put forward as the real” (p. 186). In accordance with this paradigm, the father’s hands joyfully point upwards, hoping for an ideal state of joy and cheerfulness, while Po, with their gaze, draws the observer downwards, deeply anchored in a colorless reality. The viewpoints presented in the double page, as well as the perspectives, are to some extent selected for the observer, and as a result, a moderate degree of symmetry exists between the writer’s relationship to the represented participant and the expected relationship the observer is supposed to establish with it (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 131).

In enhancing interaction, pictures amplify more fully the meaning of the words, or the words expand the picture so that different information in the two modes of communication produces a more complex dynamic (Nikolajeva and Scott 2000: 225). In this particular case, the text further enriches the visual representation with wordplay. The text states that the Sun is shining, which is in sharp contrast to the mood depicted in the picture – so different that it seems as if it is still dark

outside because nothing can be seen through the windows. The father is smiling at his Day, which is also depicted in the picture. The use of verbs and adjectives related to their Days is interesting. As already noted, Po's Day is described as boring, monotonous, and demanding, while the father's day is "dynamic, light-footed, full of speed." The father's day is further brightened by invented words like *blinketiblack* and *tutilitut*, which do not have a concrete meaning in Norwegian, but are created to give rhythm and cheerfulness to the father's Day.

5. Page two: *To fall, fall and fall*

In the second selected double page (Figure 2), a highly dramatic depiction of Po's fall, which was briefly mentioned in the overview of the picturebook's plot, is presented. The double page is clearly divided into two parts – the left side containing text and the right side featuring the illustration. The dark background frames and connects the text and the image, creating a sense of discomfort, darkness, and despair.

To begin with, the visual part of the double page will be focused on. Po's body position is portrayed as almost weightless and helpless as they fall deep into the darkness. The image is located on the right side, which, as previously mentioned, represents something new, unknown, and uncertain (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Given that this is also the key information of this double page, this simply depicted moment frozen in time indicates how important this double page is for understanding the depth and weight of Po's mood and feelings of anxiety. The textual part on the left side of the double page allows for a more substantial analysis because it is written to enrich what is depicted so simply in the image. The focus of the textual semiotic resource is the concept of the fall and how it is realized in Po's case and that of their Day. The combination of verbs such as *falle* (fall), *rase* (collapse), and *dumpe* (plunge) gives information about the gradation of the falling action and the subjective experience of the main character. Besides the fall itself, there are nouns like *virvel* (whirlpool) and *sluk* (chasm) that suggest the dark space where the fall occurs. The unique word arrangement in the text, along with the interaction of the words, accompanied by rhythm and alliteration, gives the text dynamism and dramatic intensity, especially when read aloud. The image of a mountain collapsing, something massive and heavy, is the only possible parallel for the author when describing Po's descent into the abyss or "where the Day extinguishes itself"³.

³ "... dit ned hvor Dagen slukner." (Dahle and Dahle Nyhus 2021)

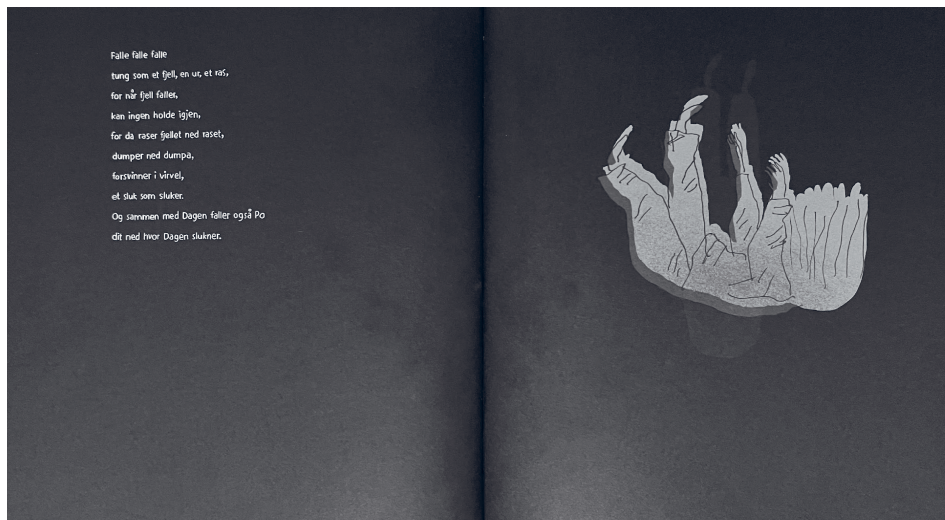


Figure 2. Double page number twelve

6. Page three: *Letting go of the heavy stones*

The double page presented by Figure 3 depicts Po and their Day at the bottom of a pit into which they have both fallen. As was done in the previous double pages, I consider each spread as a multimodal configuration of meaning or a multimodal ensemble, following Kress's framework (2010), in which both the image and verbal text "collaborate" to convey meaning (Maagerø and Østbye 2016). In terms of the interpersonal metafunction, both modes effectively represent a specific social relation between the producer, the viewer, and the object represented (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 42), reflecting their interaction as one characterized by fear and hopelessness. The observer has a horizontal perspective in relation to the represented participants, and is thus participating indirectly. The frame size in the context of this representation is wide and complete, but the positioning of Day's body suggests that the space they inhabit, although boundless, is constrained by the boundaries of the frame in which the subjects are placed. Additionally, Day's body posture can be further interpreted as establishing a power dynamic where Day is depicted as significantly larger than Po, implying a sense of dominance. This image lacks a central perspective in the sense that not all the characters are depicted in their entirety along with their surroundings (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 130).

With regard to the modality of this image in the sense described by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) or Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016), it might be expected that a somewhat subjective assessment can be provided. However, considering that the representation itself is not realistic (in fact, it is depicted hyperbolically),

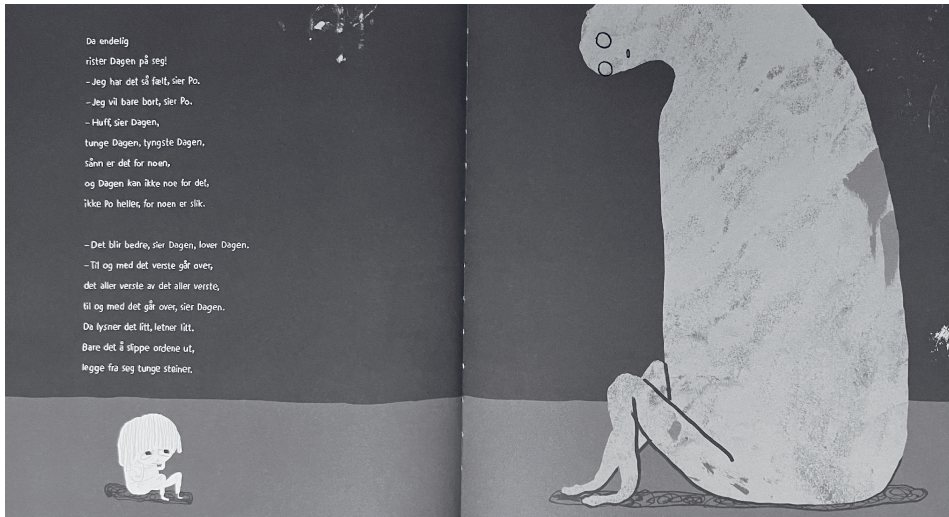


Figure 3. Double page number seventeen

it portrays a very real psychological state of confronting fear and anxiety. Day is the most prominent figure in this image when it comes to salience, but its gaze redirects the reader's attention to Po, as well as to the text above them. Po's gaze directed upward from below, from left to right, indicates their apprehension about crossing from the known and real into the new, unknown and ideal because of the gigantic representation of Day standing in their way. However, what primarily underscores the textual metafunction on this double page is the text itself. Unlike the previously analyzed double page where the concept of falling was emphasized, here, the text can be divided into two paragraphs. The first paragraph highlights heaviness, which is most evident in the gradation *tunge* and *tyngste* (heavy, heaviest), while the second paragraph suggests finding light and relief by "letting go of the heavy stones."⁴ The repetition of words in the text not only gives it a certain rhythm but also emphasizes the words that the reader, as an observer, should pay attention to and repeats them enough times to engrave them into the reader's memory. Through the textual semiotic resource, the author achieves an interpersonal connection with the reader, implanting a specific thought into their consciousness (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Another significant semiotic aspect of this double page are the hints given of the color yellow, which are mirrors of the textual semiotic resource, symbolizing light and hope. The yellow color appears in the outlines, mostly in the upper part of the page, as well as on the far right, which, through the interpretation of the positioning of such symbols, suggests that what is new and coming is brighter and better.

⁴ "... legge fra seg tunge steiner." (Dahle and Dahle Nyhus 2021)

7. Page four: *Smiling grass, sun and the world's best spaghetti*

Towards the very end of the book, an image that starkly differs from all the other double pages in the book (Figure 4) is encountered, both in terms of theme and mood, as well as the color palette, which is undoubtedly the first noticeable aspect. Bright and warm colors surround Po and their father as they play outside together with Day, who frolics around. This page serves as a kind of resolution to the narrative, in which Po realizes that there are other Days, lighter than the one they experienced throughout the book. Despite this, Po remains the central focus of the image and is still the only figure to be depicted uncolored. Like the previous double page, Po is presented as a small figure who timidly observes the larger figure of their Father, depicted on the right-hand side. This time, the figure of Day is faceless, also on the right-hand side, running towards the right, thereby emphasizing its transience. Examining the vector created by Po looking at their father more closely, it can be seen that even though it is a diagonal from bottom to top, this time it conveys a sense of trust rather than fear or subservience. Both represented participants are depicted with smiles on their faces, further supporting the claim to a change in aspect. Father is once again presented with an additional vector, represented by his thumbs pointing upwards. Given that this hand gesture is conventionally and culturally marked as a positive sign⁵, it underscores the positive aspect of this image. The figures are open to the observer, and the entire representation, which is highly naturalistic, invites the observer to step inside and experience the wonder of such a bright Day. The textual meta-function of semiotic resources in this double page provides a series of elements for interpretation. It is particularly interesting to see the stones mentioned in the previous double pages. They are still there, and there are quite a number of them – indicating to the observer that even on a brilliantly beautiful day, people's burdens and heaviness are still present. The text does not mention the stones explicitly, but it states that Po is *tung i beina*, which translates to “heavy in the legs,” bringing us back to the previously emphasized heaviness.

The horizon line divides this double page horizontally. Thus, Po and their father are depicted in the lower, realistic part of the image, along with the stones, while Day is much closer to the upper, ideal side. But what about the tree? The tree represents the only vertical in this image, which can be interpreted in multiple ways. Firstly, it can be noticed that the tree is colored in the same green tones as the father's clothing, so their appearances can be associated with being positive. This conclusion is supported by the text stating, *det er fint i treet*, meaning “it's nice in the tree.” The tree is the vertical that reflects the diversity of possibilities that everyone can

⁵ There are several contributions by the aforementioned authors within the paper regarding the cultural nature of interpreting different semiotic resources and symbols: Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), Jewitt et al. (2013), Kress (2009), Ledin and Machin (2018).

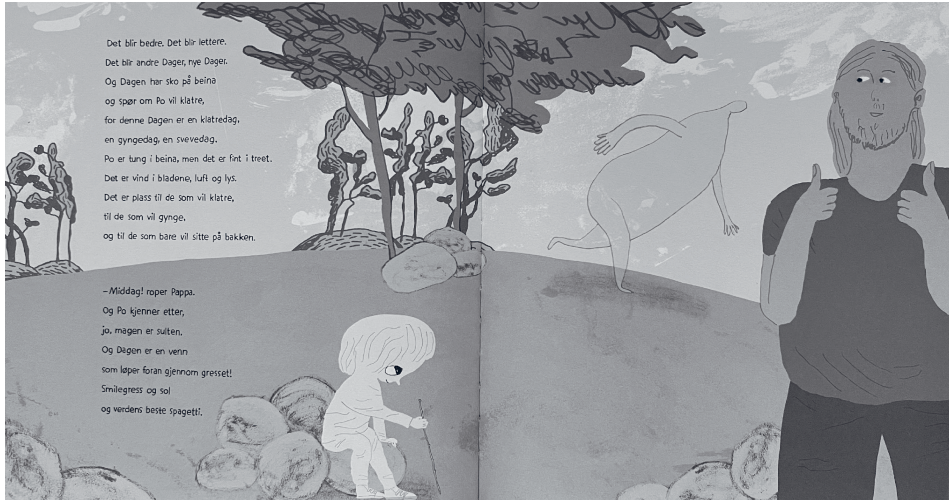


Figure 4. Double page number twenty

enjoy during their Day, which is also mentioned in the first paragraph of the text. Besides the wind, air, and light, one can climb the tree, swing on its branches, or simply sit beneath its canopy – there is room for various activities. The first paragraph of the text is also placed in the upper half of the page, making it a part of the ideal realm. Reading the text in the following paragraph, there is a transition into the real realm where the father calls Po for dinner. It is at this moment there is a realization that Po has indeed become closer to Day. Additionally, the alliteration of the “s” sound in this part of the text seems to accelerate the tempo and add dynamism to the text by creating a rustling sound.

8. The meeting point of medicine and literature

The subject matter presented in the picturebook, alongside the referenced articles, goes considerably beyond common perception. Being courageous enough to deal with depression and anxiety, the authors tried to describe and represent all the symptoms in ways that are visual and strong. Po’s general mood described in the book is reflected to a great degree in the medical articles and, with help of pictures and use of literary language, the book tries to help the reader understand just how deep and dangerous these states can become. By personifying Day, the authors open a new world of understanding on how certain people perceive their reality. It is not something that is often thought about, but it is something that is discussed all the time and which is given various qualities and descriptions. Thus, Day being perceived as a character rather than a measurement of time expands the understanding of the severity of it being dark, heavy and unkind. Its

embodiment makes it easier for the reader to comprehend the message. Since age, gender and other factors have been mentioned in the articles, it should be taken into consideration that Po being a child is unable to cope with the problem at hand on their own. It is crucial for people in the child's immediate surroundings to be able to recognize the problem and make sure that appropriate help is provided at the proper time. Po's journey to health is presented in the book as an adventurous endeavor but continues even after the words and pictures in the book have finished. In relation to the post-COVID context of the present time, the book not only helps the reader understand just how crucial it is to ask for help, but also fosters the realization that some days just might not be as light as we expect them to be or, for that matter, heavy.

9. Conclusion

The analysis of the chosen picturebook, along with the exploration of relevant literature on post-COVID depression and anxiety, reveals an important intersection of literature and medicine. The multidisciplinary approach adopted in this article sheds light on the intricate landscape of mental health, providing a unique lens through which the challenges posed by conditions such as depression can be better understood and addressed. The picturebook itself is a testament to the power of visual storytelling and literary expression in conveying the complexities of mental illness, particularly from the perspective of a child. Through the personification of Day and the vivid imagery used, the authors offer readers a visceral experience of the emotional weight and darkness that individuals with depression and anxiety may face. This approach not only fosters empathy but also serves as a means of initiating conversations about mental health, especially among young readers.

Delving into the academic underpinnings of social semiotics and multimodality, deeper insights into the semiotic constituents within the selected pages of the book are gained. The metafunctions elucidated by Kress and van Leeuwen, as well as other authors, allow the dissection of the visual grammar and meaning-making processes within the book. This analytical framework enriches understanding of how the authors effectively communicate the main protagonist's emotional journey. Furthermore, by examining the literature on post-COVID depression, a critical parallel between Po's experiences and real-world individuals grappling with the mental health consequences of the pandemic is identified.

Looking to the future of discussions based in literature, especially in relation to mental illness, *Dagen* offers a valuable resource for educators, caregivers, and mental health professionals. It provides a platform for open dialogues about emotions, coping mechanisms, and the significance of seeking help. The book's approachable narrative and vivid illustrations make it accessible to both children and adults, facilitating intergenerational conversations on mental health. In a world

where discussions around mental health continue to evolve, literature remains a potent tool for raising awareness, reducing stigma, and fostering empathy. This picturebook serves as a poignant example of how literature, art, and academia can converge to deepen comprehension of complex human experiences. As the post-COVID era continues to be navigated, this multidisciplinary exploration is a reminder of the enduring power of storytelling to illuminate the path towards healing and understanding in the face of mental illness.

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