

The World is a Deaf Machine

An analysis into how the visual language in Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree* is used to communicate depression.

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Summary of Topic

In this dissertation, I will be examining how the illustrations and visual language used throughout *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan coherently communicate depression.

Introduction

In this dissertation, I will be examining how the illustrations and visual language used throughout *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan coherently communicate depression. *The Red Tree* is a book which follows a young girl's journey through the day as she struggles with depression; symbolised by visual metaphor and surrealist imagery. As an illustrator fascinated by picture books and as someone who has suffered with their own mental health, this is a personal and significant topic which I feel needs more discussion. I will be working through the pages and spreads individually, carefully examining the rich variety of mediums, techniques and symbolism used to represent the daily life and cyclic routines of someone who is suffering with depression; analysing both the subtle nuances and the obvious representations of such. There will be two chapters doing so; one in which I talk about the darkness the character is feeling, and one which follows her on a journey of healing. How exactly children are exposed to topics as delicate and challenging as depression is incredibly important so that they can become more conscious of their own emotions, as well as recognising the feelings of others around them. However, it is a topic which can be incredibly scary and intimidating for both adults and children alike to confront. Perfectly summed up by Tucker, an academic, writer and honorary cultural studies lecturer (1991), 'Childhood is an impressionable period when children pick up and acclimatise themselves to different norms and attitudes of their own culture'.

Chapter 1: The Darkness



sometimes the day begins
with nothing to look forward to

Fig 1, The Day Begins, p6

On the first page (Fig 1), we are presented with a square illustration in the middle of a vast amount of blank white space. This instantly makes the reader feel a little claustrophobic, as the character probably does within her own mind. It suggests that she feels trapped and boxed in, even when in her own bedroom which should be a place of comfort and solace. The accompanying text reads ‘Sometimes the day begins with nothing to look forward to.’ On the surface this quite plainly

describes the initial feelings of depression. However, when we look at the artistic implementation of the words, it is quite obvious that there is a purposeful and deeper meaning behind them. The text is not perfectly aligned, and each letter is individually stamped, giving it a slightly broken feel. Both of these indicate and predict the disorder the character will face later on in the book. As well as this, the letters are all in lowercase; which suggests a level of monotony and gives the words little expression or personality. Again, this reflects and mimics the state of mind that comes with a disorder such as depression.



Fig 2, The Tree Blooms, p32

The choice of colour also plays an important role throughout the entire book, as can already be seen in figure 2. Colours can really change the emotions felt when looking at an image, as The University of Chicago notes in their essay analysis of *The Red Tree* that; “The colours that the composer has used through the book aren’t bright and happy colours, but plain, dull and sad colours that set a sombre mood for the story” (2018). The colours on the first page set the mood for the whole book immediately, without having to look at the text at all.

There are a lot of grey and blue tones used within the space of her bedroom. Ordinarily, this is a colour associated with lack of feeling. After some research however, interesting alternative perspectives were presented. Judy Scott-Kemmis, a Colour and Design graduate, (2017) notes that; “Being both motionless and emotionless, Grey is solid and stable, creating a sense of calm and composure, relief from a chaotic world.” This is a viewpoint that actually makes a lot of sense when considering the book and the story it is telling. It is about a young girl struggling with her depression, and the colours, lines and other visual clues increase in intensity greatly as soon as she steps out of her room. So, whilst her room may seem like a dull hub of monotony in which her depression is most rampant, actually this is quite the opposite. Her bedroom is the place in which her mental health is at its most stable and calm; the place in which she has the most control of her surroundings and how they affect her. This is also reinforced by the very last page of the book in which when returning to her bedroom after a long day of dealing with her internal struggles, a large red tree has sprouted there bringing colour back into her life, both literally and metaphorically. The girl also smiles for the first time throughout the entirety of the story; up until this point she has no mouth present at all. The fact that this all happens in her bedroom is symbolic of it being an important place of comfort to her, as well as place where she feels trapped within her own mind. It highlights the contradictions and complications that embody depression.



Fig 3, Drowning, 2008, p7

Progressing through the book, the contrast between dark and light becomes more prominent as seen in Figure 3, where the little black leaves present in her bedroom have rapidly multiplied into a swarm and are flooding the room with darkness. This is a metaphor for the depression taking over and ruining what little security she has left. The fact that they are so animated is eerie and makes the reader feel quite uncomfortable as they quickly flood the whole room until half of the girl's body is consumed representing just how quickly depression can take over. In a way the image is quite morbid and surreal; children reading this and looking at the images may find that they are able to relate to the

visual description of depression, and thus be reassured. Tucker (1991) touches on this topic in his book *The Child and the Book*;

Individuals may also have other morbid or anxious fantasies, and finding these mirrored in print can be again both reassuring and sometimes fascinating, particularly for child readers with less experience – both of themselves or other people – to draw upon

(Tucker, 1991, p132)



However, as mentioned by Segal, a blogger and illustrator (2016), darkness isn't necessarily a bad theme when it comes to picture books; 'Dark children's books give us a different type of optimism,

one that comes from pessimism and the sometimes sad, sometimes happy reality of life. They are important and great counterparts to cheerful children's books.' (Segal, Bookstr, 2016)

These themes are especially prominent in Figure 4. When speaking about depression, metaphors such as black dogs and ravens are used; however, here we are presented with a giant fish. It casts a huge shadow over her, and isolates her from the people around. The fish makes readers incredibly uncomfortable due to its grotesqueness; it looks dead or ill with a soulless eye of which is seeping with some form of black liquid. This could be representative of many things. The fact that the fish is so large is indicative of not only how quickly depression can grow and how heavy it can feel as it takes over your life, but also as a visual metaphor of how helpless one can feel when suffering from ill mental health. To the reader, the fish is blatantly obvious, and yet, none of the other people on the page seem to notice it at all; they're all wrapped up in their own lives and tasks for the day and do not even take a second glance at the dark giant plaguing the girl. This is a way of showing that when consumed by the darkness of one's own mind, they can feel utterly helpless and trapped in the vicious cycle that is depression. It's unlikely that she can even see the fish herself, she may not even be aware it is there. All the girl in the story knows is that the day is very dark, overcast with heavy shadows; very accurately describing how sufferers all too often feel.



Fig 5, Bottled Up, 2008, p10-11

The theme of crying out for help and not being heard reoccurs throughout the book. For example, just by turning to the next page, this feeling is strongly echoed. The girl appears to be curled up in a large glass bottle wearing a diving helmet. Again, the feeling of claustrophobia and being trapped are presented. Not only that, it is obvious that by being so covered up with thick heavy materials, no one is going to hear her no matter how loud she shouts. It is also evident however, that there is no one there to hear her in the first place. Again we are visited by the theme of loneliness and helplessness. Even if she could cry out for help, it would do no good since there is no one around for miles to listen to anything she has to say. It also feels impossible to escape as the neck of the bottle is so thin; she has no real way to get out. A form of pathetic fallacy is also used here with the presence of storm-clouds and rain, replicating the feeling of being cold, scared and alone. The medium and colours with which illustrations are created with are important to getting this message across. As Brooks, an award winning author and illustrator, says (2011) when describing their lengthy process of adding layers to

create the desired effects in his own illustrations, ‘until I felt the image had everything I was able to find. Until I felt it matched the voice in the writing – the texture of the language.’ (Brooks R, 2011, p282-283)

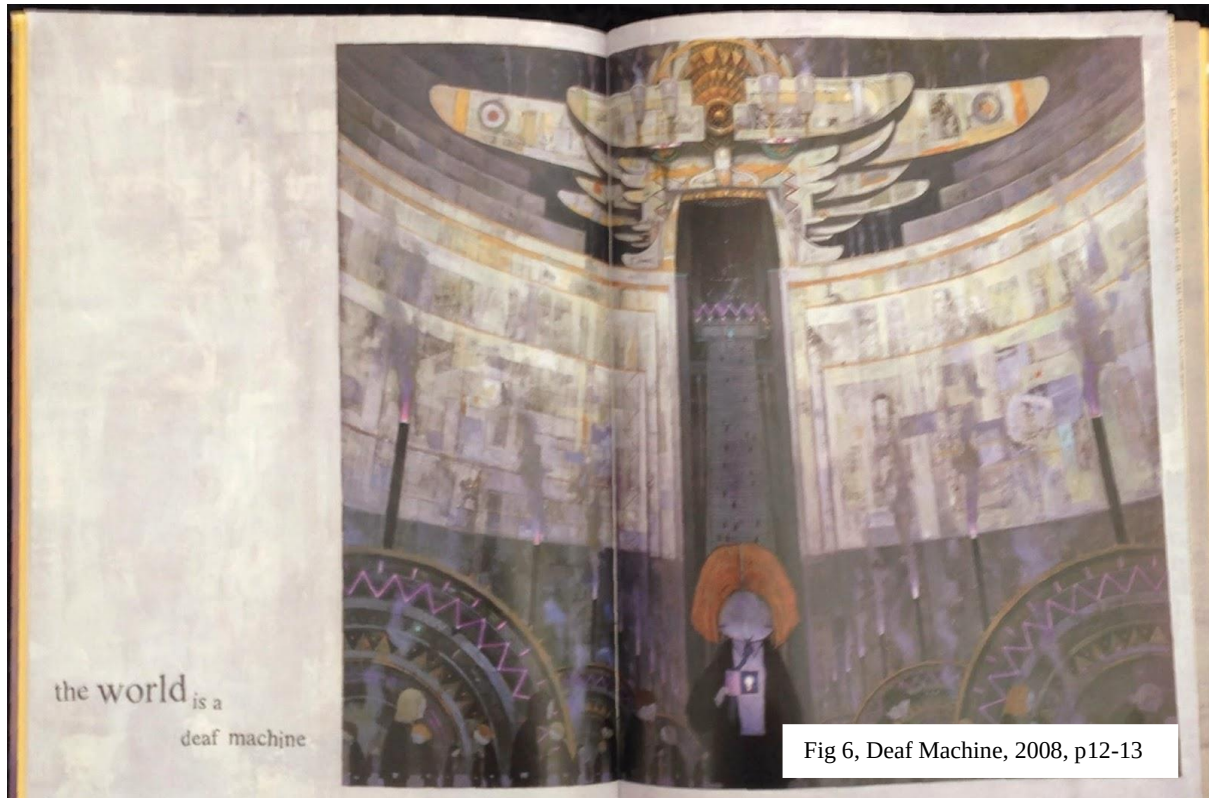


Fig 6, Deaf Machine, 2008, p12-13

Whereas the page before used nature and pathetic fallacy to recreate the feelings of depression, Figure 6 uses the opposite; machines and monotony. However, they do share similar messages and themes; both referring to the feeling of not being heard. The previous page showed her trapped and alone with no one around for miles. However, on this page, the character is seemingly free of those constrictions and surrounded by others once again, giving the impression that she should be able to be heard more easily. This is not the case as the text clearly states ‘the world is a deaf machine’; the world is deaf to her pleas for help whether she is physically trapped or not. Referring to the world as a machine also has an important implication on the way she is feeling. Machines are associated with emotionlessness, monotony and being cold. She seems to be in a factory full of clone-like people, surrounded by large intimidating machines, albeit very similar ones. The theme of sameness is very prominent on this page and bears a heavy resemblance to the way one can feel when depressed; trapped in a vicious cycle or routine that continues day after day with no escape and no frivolity or

stimulation in any way, shape or form. Their clothes add to this theme of dreariness as well; they are all wearing black business suits. Very often in visual media, whether it be in book, film form or otherwise, business people, especially when all grouped together as they are on this page, are referred to as robotic and used as symbolism to portray the machine that is life; the same routine every single day, unfeeling. Though of a completely different genre and media, this is distinctly comparable to the monotony portrayed by technology and a factory-like existence in the film *Metropolis*, as appropriately explained by Deborah Kireger, a website blogger, (2017) here.

The workers of *Metropolis* are not only associated with machines and technology through their daily labor, but they are also depicted as extremely robotic, monotonous, and identical in their movements. They are all dressed in the same masculinized dark clothing and live what could be called robotic lifestyles, following the same work schedule day in and day out.

(Kreiger, Bitchflicks, 2017)

Not only this however, but the fact that their business suits are black is by no accident. Black is almost always used to represent darkness, depression, and even death; all negative associations. More specifically, Olesen (2015), a designer and website publisher and author touches on the psychology and meaning behind the colour black in literature especially when combined with a red and orange colour scheme like as is presented on this page. He notes that black is used in literature to portray evil, death, power, formality, elegance, mystery and fear, all of which are certainly dominant traits and emotions within the walls of depression. He also goes on to talk about how when black often has negative connotations, and that when combined with red or orange, it can create a highly aggressive and uncomfortable colour scheme. However, returning to the subject of the other characters present on this page, and how similar they all are, it is interesting to note that many of them look almost identical to the main character, particularly their hairstyles, which are the only defining characteristics of any of the people here. Most of these characters have either ginger, black, or grey hair. This could be a subtle nod to the different stages of depression, as well as the different personalities that come with it. The ginger haired characters, the same as our main character's, could be used to symbolise the start of the journey of depression. That is not to say that they are not suffering, but there may still be glimmers of hope left for them to escape. This hypothesis is further backed up by the ever-present red

leaf throughout the book, which symbolises the hope that she feels is still left for her, however small. Furthermore, the black and grey haired characters present a more obvious type of symbolism in the form of the darker their hair is, the deeper they are into their depression and hopelessness. This is especially true with the longer haired characters, as their long hair blends perfectly into the business suits, making them less defined as the shape of a human being. The likeness to the feelings of depression are very strong on this page, even though they may not seem so at first glance.

Chapter 2: The Light



The next page is an absolute opposite to anything seen from the book so far and is almost blinding to look at for it being so bright. This contrast really draws attention to just how unpredictable depression can be, and how it can invade one's mind and truly take over, leaving absolutely no control to the owner at all. It is also perfectly timed in the middle of the book, following on from the dreariness and themes of monotony, even though it may seem surprising at first. The feelings of being trapped and drowned and hopeless can trigger a reaction where the emotions can just completely let loose all at once in an uncontrollable manner. It is already established from the previous pages that when depressed your feelings are hard to control, if you have any kind of emotions at all, and this is ultimately true at both ends of the spectrum.

Of course, one of the main points to address on this page is the incredibly strong and effective use of colour. Gage, an Art Historian (2000) touches on the importance of colour in art and literature in his book *Colour and Meaning* as he discusses how many agree that colour is crucial to the understanding and emotion of a piece, however everyone sees colour in a different way depending on the way they

have been exposed to that colour in the past. This is an interesting point because whilst colours are a completely subjective element to any piece of artwork, there are definitely certain colours which strike up instant and similar reactions for most people viewing them. For example, how the bright reds are used here to communicate chaos and raw emotion. Nodelman (1988) backs up this notion in his book *Words About Pictures* where he says “Picture Books also seem to share the schemes implied by Wexner’s subjects. They selected Red, Orange and Black almost equally to suggest defiance and hostility”

From the point of view of how chaotic and hard to control depression can be, this page certainly shows the worst stage of such a mental illness. Everything on the page is indeed ‘without sense or reason’ as the accompanying text reads. The chaos is shown in a variety of ways, both obvious and subtle. One of the main ways this is shown is through the varying pieces of texts scattered throughout the page. They are completely out of context and almost impossible to read because of how layered they are, and also because of how many of them are actually in foreign languages. Of course, everything on this page is layered over everything else and makes it incredibly hard to focus on one particular point for an extended period of time because of how much there is to see. This represents the way in which the mind can be disarrayed when depressed and how focusing on anything, big or small, can be an almost impossible task; the mind is at war with itself and has enough going on as it is. However, despite this being a truly chaotic and almost maddening page, representing the state of mind of the character at this time, being at your worst often means that you can start to heal and get better, because ‘the only way is up’. This stage of attempted healing is actually shown on the page too, as for the first time so far, the character is making an effort to escape the negativities the page is throwing at her. She does this by climbing a ladder to try and escape, and whilst she may not be particularly successful yet, especially as all of the ladders are thrown about the page at different angles making the feat an almost impossible one, the mere effort itself shows hope.

Extending on from the above point, the theme of journey is a particularly strong one throughout this page, echoing her need for escape. There are planes of all shapes and sizes flying in different directions right across the breadth of the double page spread. Planes are obviously associated with

travelling, particularly to places too far away to get there by oneself. This could be showing the need for help to get where she wants to go, but also the valiancy she's showing in making an attempt to escape in the first place.

Everything on this page is very fast paced and chaotic, a complicated amalgamation of everything felt when struggling with a war inside your own mind. The next page however, shows an incredible contrast once again, slowing the pace right down, further enforcing the idea of how unpredictable depression, or any mental health disorder, can be.

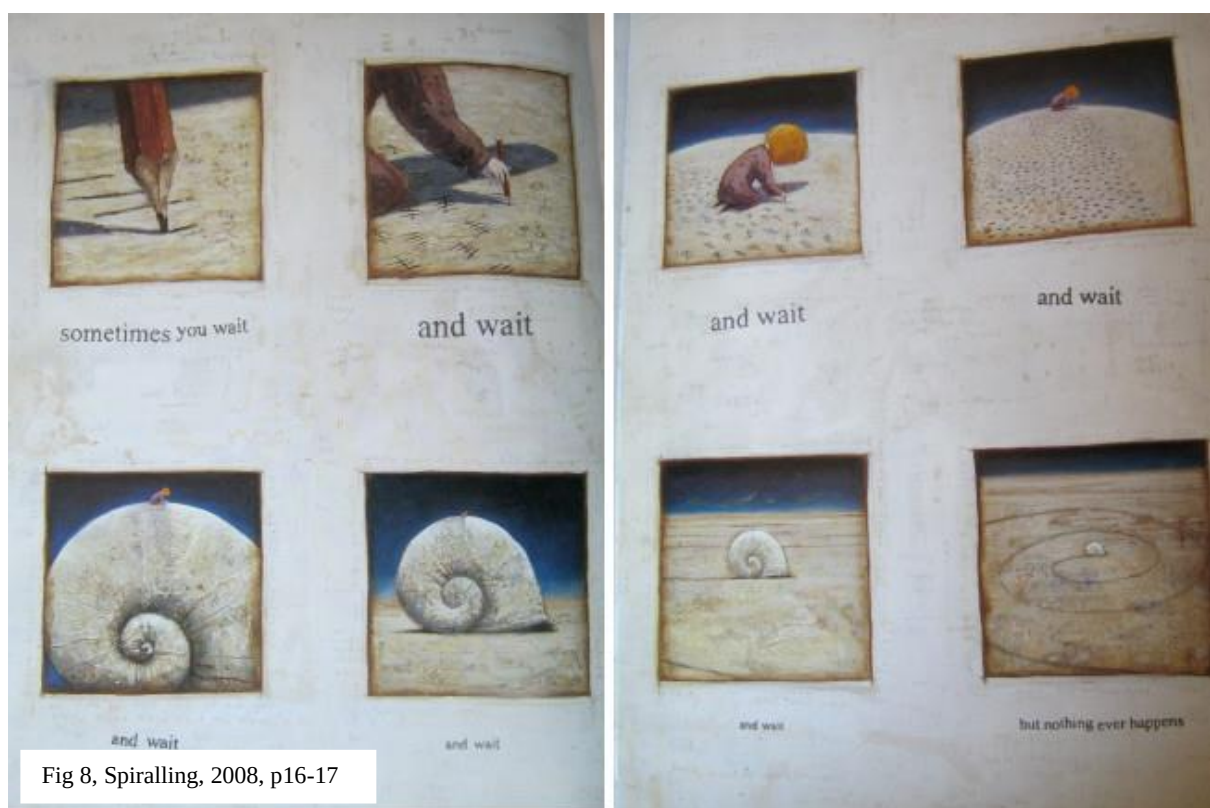


Fig 8, Spiralling, 2008, p16-17

Here we are presented with a series of eight squares of what is essentially the same image repeated over and over again, just each time becoming more and more zoomed out to reveal the whole picture. The repetition and almost tedium of this page really reflects how slow moving depression can feel. When comparing it to the previous page where a glimmer of hope is felt for the character as she starts to climb out of the chaos encompassing her mind, here it feels as though she is back to square one. However, this slowness may not necessarily be a step backwards. As mentioned, she does start making a small effort to heal and get better, and this page could be reminiscent of that healing

process. Depression is not something one can simply climb out of and then be on their way, carrying on with life as if nothing ever happened; it is much more complex than that. The healing process, particularly at the beginning is one that is very slow and difficult to move through. Leading on from this, the text mentions that ‘sometimes you wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait but nothing ever happens’ and this highlights the struggle of healing. There must be effort from the one suffering in order to move forward, without working through the ups and downs of the illness, it really can feel like waiting for a miracle, stuck in a never ending spiral often referred to as ‘limbo’. This is precisely where our character seems to be trapped on this page.

Of course, the character being on top of a snail simply reinforces how slow moving this process can feel. Werness, a university professor, art historian and published author (2006) talks about the symbolic meanings behind visuals of snails in art in her book *The Continuum Encyclopaedia Of Animal Symbolism in Art* and raises some interesting and relevant points. She goes on to say “The snail also suggested by its helical shell the spiralling processes of cyclical continuity. It is found in Aztec iconography as a symbol of rebirth and resurrection” as well as “The snail was a symbol of sloth and those who are content with things of the material world at the expense of striving for the spiritual”. These notions back up the idea of the character being stuck in a seemingly never ending process of ‘cyclical continuity’ which can at times seem like a hopeless effort. However, Werness also mentions that the snail is often used as a symbol for rebirth and resurrection, and despite previous notes of monotony, this is also very relevant and true. It has already been discussed that the main character is attempting to make an escape, no matter how small the effort may be, and whilst the snail represents a possible hopelessness, it does also acknowledge the fact that she is in fact starting to heal, and that she is essentially being resurrected into the start of what could potentially be her new life.

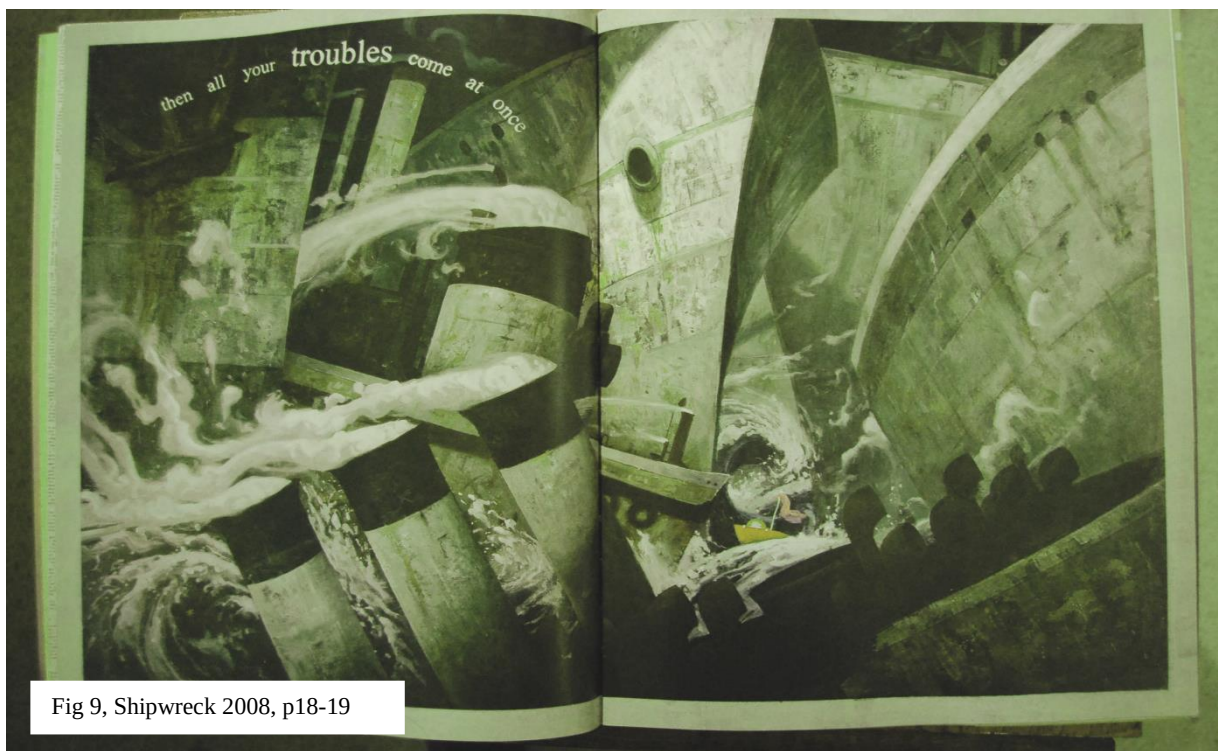


Fig 9, Shipwreck 2008, p18-19

Here we are presented with an illustration which is initially very similar in style and colour to figure 5 where we see the girl trapped in a bottle. Both use water and weather as a visual metaphor for how she is feeling, though at slightly different ends of the spectrum. Whilst in the previous page, the rain is slowly filling up the bottle, dragging out the process and gradually drowning her, here we are presented with large and chaotically dangerous waves which could easily drag her small boat under at any given second. It is interesting to note that whilst on the previous pages she was situated more towards the top of the page, or at least climbing towards it, to represent the start of the healing process, here she has sunk back to the bottom and is very small in comparison to everything else we can see. This is in relation to a relapse within the healing process. It is almost difficult to spot the character on this page as the rest of the illustrations are so large and strong, suggesting that once more, she is starting to feel helpless and drowning within her own mind again. This is particularly pertinent as, according to Marchand, a clinical associate professor of psychiatry (2016) 'The risk of recurrence – "relapse after full remission" – for a person who's had one episode of depression is 50%.'

The way the ships have been illustrated on this page is also of exacting importance due to their intimidating size. They could symbolise a great deal of problems facing the character whether it be certain people, issues she is working through or even just the dark feelings of being at war within her own mind, and everything clashing and crashing, and not being able to make sense of anything she is thinking or feeling. It is really quite difficult to clearly make sense of the ships drawn on the page here. None of them have a beginning or end as such; they all blend into each other and really trap the character who in comparison, is riding on a very small and weak looking boat with a meagre sail. This is certainly representative of her depression taking over once again and her not being able to do anything about it. The reader is left wondering if she will ever truly be able to escape after following the ups and downs right along with her.



Fig 10, Locked Out, p20-21

The next page is notably interesting for a variety of reasons. At first glance, it feels a lot happier than the other pages, and the reader may sigh a brief breath of relief. The colours are much brighter and overall the page has a happier composition. However, when looking deeper into the images on this page, it still bears quite an adequate resemblance depression and feeling trapped; it is a page of true juxtaposition really. It presents us with a happy atmosphere of fluffy sunset clouds and a fantastical creature or object trailed by butterflies and confetti like streams blowing through the wind. The clouds offer several points of view. As mentioned, they at first appear to be clouds of a sunset or sunrise due to their orange colour, however, the underneath of the clouds are very dark, and the clouds hovered over the character even more so. This symbolises her lack of sight for the positives around her; there are bright clouds all around, but she is stuck in the small patch of darkness within them; if only she would turn around.

However, it is only then that we notice the character, sadly pressing up against a window barred with a padlock engraved with the words 'regret'. It is also important to note that the red leaf, her symbol of hope, is on the locked side of the window meaning that she is unable to get to it; so close and yet out of reach. This in itself is a sadly accurate visual metaphor for the way depression can feel, which surely hits close to the bone with many readers viewing it.

However, the juxtaposition here again is thought-provoking, as even though she is locked away from her hope and unable to get through the window, she is actually on the side of the perceived happiness and 'wonderful things' passing her by. As The University of Chicago (2018) better summarise in their essay "She can see all these wonderful things passing her by, but she cannot interact with any of them. She cannot escape." Fascinatingly enough, Becker, an author and editor specialising in Encyclopaedias and Lexicon (2000), notes that "Windows sometimes symbolize receptivity and openness to external influences" which is again highlighting the fact that depression overwhelms her drive to interact with the wonderful things around her, instead focusing on how trapped she feels. This is symbolic of how one can feel when depressed; sufferers often find it difficult to focus on the positives in life and cannot always see the happiness around them.

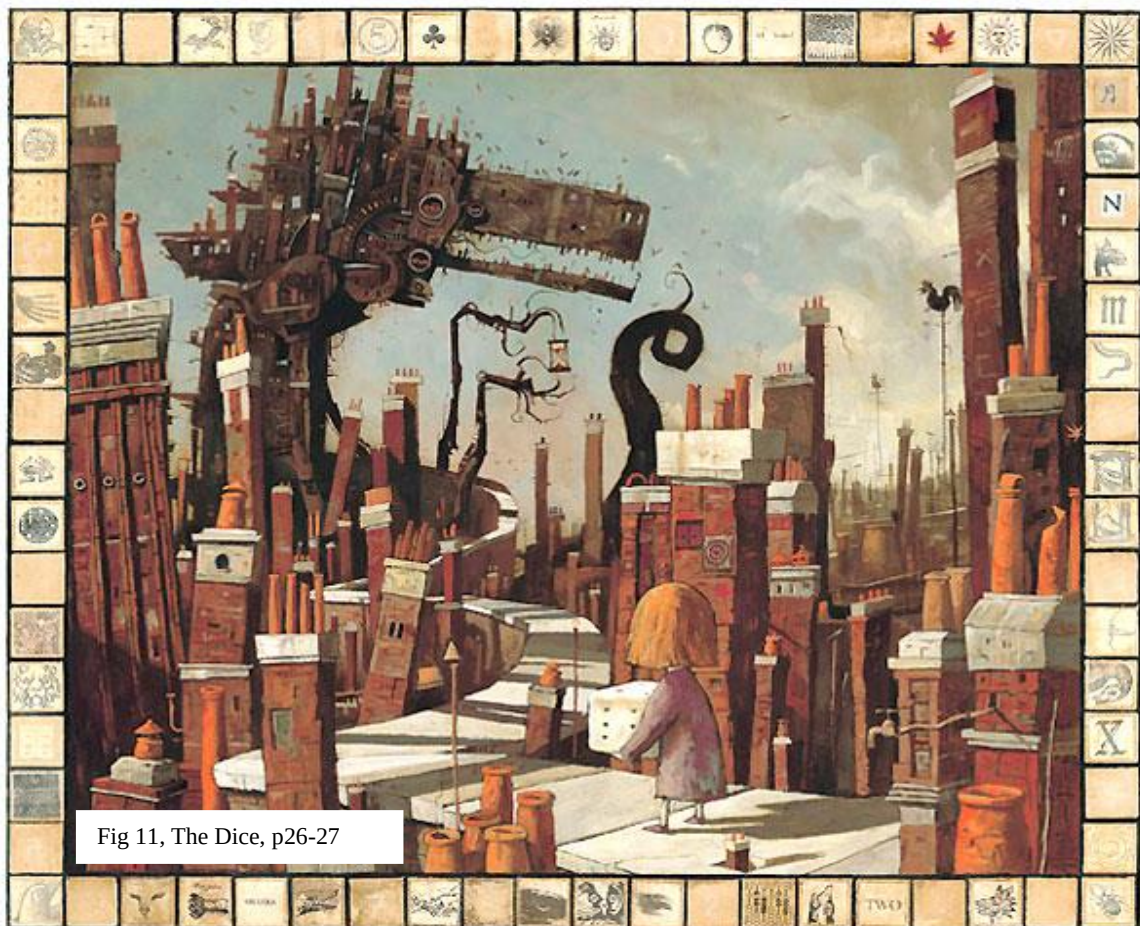


Fig 11, The Dice, p26-27

This page presents us with a large array of motifs and symbols to choose from. The most obviously visible imagery on the page however, comes down to the giant monster-like building in the background, and the large die the character is holding. The accompanying text states ‘Terrible fates are inevitable’ and this is very clearly shown by the illustration we are presented with. Whilst ‘terrible fates are inevitable’ seems to be an almost macabre outlook on life suggesting an incredibly negative conclusion, it could actually be the character’s acceptance of what is to come within her battle with mental health. The character has only one way she can go; her right to decide is completely stripped from her. Again, whilst this seems scary and intimidating at first, it could be symbolic of her acceptance of moving forward, and knowing that the only way to battle the monsters is to face them head on by moving towards them and confronting them. This is also reinforced by how the character is facing towards the monster and looks ready to start her journey.

The end of the road from which the reader can see, is home to a scary looking dog-like creature composed of metalwork and buildings. Again, here we have a referral to the coldness of machinery

and how it can be used in illustration to portray negative connotations. Also, from a historical point of view, as highlighted by SANE, a mental health charity;

The Black Dog has been used from classical mythology through medieval folklore to modern times as a universal metaphor for depression: Sir Winston Churchill famously used it to describe his darker moods.

(SANE, 2010)

This further backs up the idea of the darker monsters being metaphors of her depression. The monster is also incredibly dark compared to the rest of the page and really stands out. It is a literal metaphor of the dark monsters that must be faced when dealing with depression. It is also holding an egg timer, almost taunting the character about how time is of the essence.

The dice is also of significance, or more specifically, the numbers on it. Only two sides can be seen, but they both have the number six on, as opposed to two different numbers as would be expected. From this, the possibility can be presumed that all sides contain this number. This is interesting, because the number six, from a biblical stand point, as highlighted by Bullinger, an Anglican clergyman, Biblical Scholar and Theologian (2014) is symbolic of “labour and sorrow, and it specially marks all that is ‘under the sun’, all that is ‘not of God’”. This is an interesting point of view because ‘not of God’ generally refers to something which is inhuman, like the big monster facing the character. ‘Labour and sorrow’ is also of significance because sorrow is obviously a strongly associated emotion with depression, and labour can be used to describe how hard it is to move through depression, and fight that battle, when the time comes.

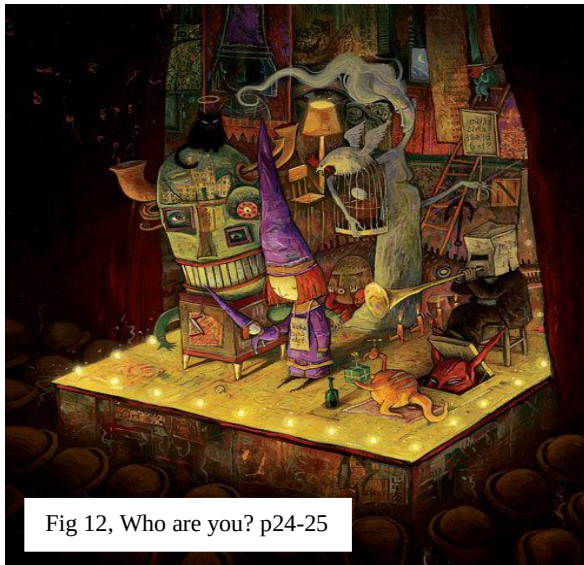


Fig 12, Who are you? p24-25

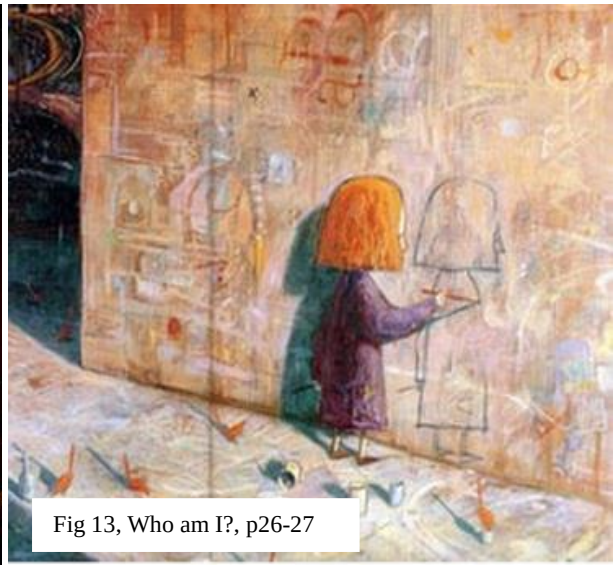


Fig 13, Who am I?, p26-27

The next two pages are very similar in what they are trying to convey, and focus on an important part of the healing process when it comes to depression; self-doubt. Though in slightly different ways, they both talk about not knowing who the character is meant to be; she is trying to discover who she is and what she is meant to do with her life. In the left, she is put up on a stage with a puppet of herself and presented in front of a large clone-like audience who are all staring up at her. There are many characters up on the stage with her who all seem very animated and active, whilst she is stood there very still and looking anxious. This represents her fear of being a clone, much like those in the audience, and not knowing who she is or how exactly she is unique, and how out of place she feels in life. This is something very common in sufferers of depression and is one of the symptoms which makes them question why they were put on the earth to begin with; it can lead to a quickly spiralling cycle of self-doubt and darkness within the mind.

It is interesting to note that, as per the left illustration, she has a note round her neck saying 'kuka sina olet?' As translated by Kuzmic, a website builder, translator and blogger, (2003), this means 'who are you?' which leads perfectly onto the next page which has that exact message.

The next page sees the character drawing an outline of herself with the associated text 'or who you are meant to be'. She is redrawing herself in the hope that this will help her to visualise who exactly she is meant to be. She draws herself exactly the way she is now, and that could mean a selection of things. It could be positive in that actually, she is starting to finally understand who she is. She replicates

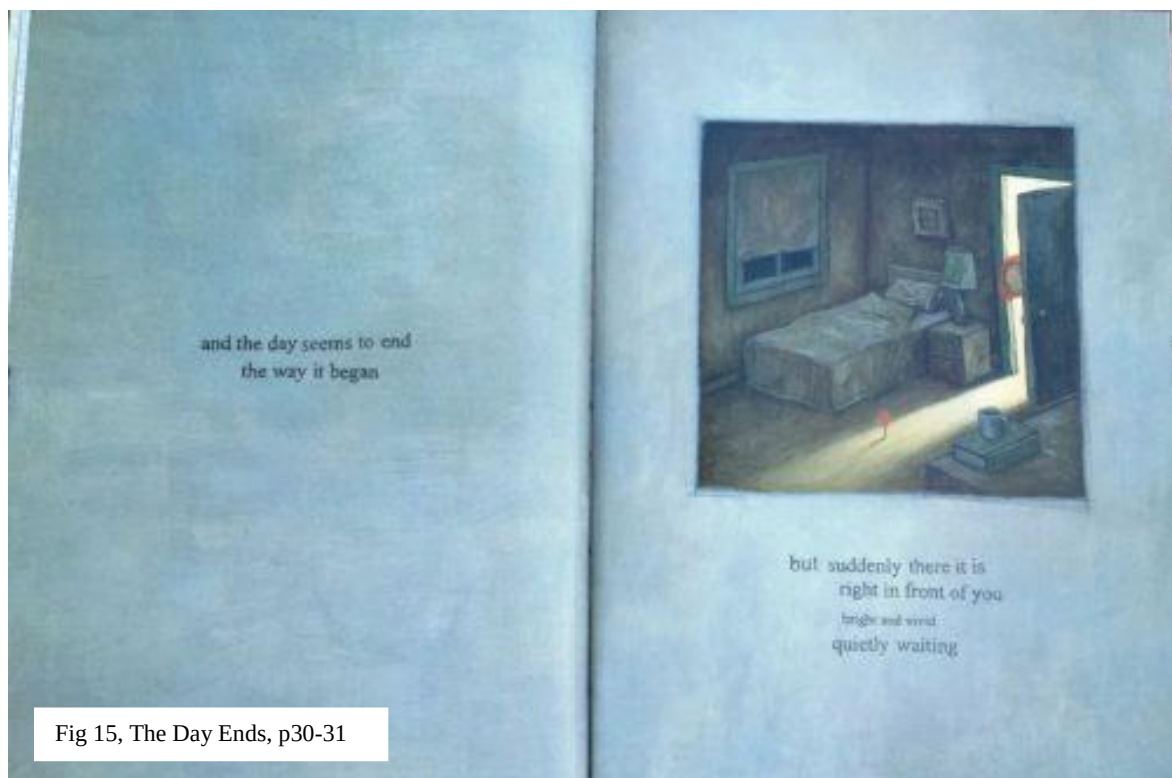
herself exactly the way she is now because that is who she is, and who she wants to be. This is another way of looking in a mirror to really assess who you are, but that only looks at the outside of you, and not the inside, which is the most valuable part of any personality or character.



The next page shows the character still feeling lost, but in a more literal sense at first glance. The text reads ‘or where you are’ which backs up the literal meaning of the image as well. However, it is already established in several previous pages of the book, particularly the former two that she is lost within her own mind, and it is more probable that this is what this page is referring to; it is more metaphorical. Again, we see an overbearing use of the colour red here, and the red leaf is on the opposite side of the page to the girl, really quite hopelessly out of reach. The character is once again incredibly small which makes the reader feel quite sad and empathetic, because with the last few pages, her character has been getting bigger on the pages, symbolising how well her journey was going and how she was starting to overcome her inner demons. As mentioned earlier however, this is a reality check and really highlights how dangerously deceptive and erratic depression can be. It is so

easy to get lost, especially when living in a mental landscape such as the one the girl is living in here. The mark making surrounding the red leaf is particularly dark and daunting really drawing attention to the hopelessness she feels inside. It is done on purpose to create this desired effect for the reader. As mentioned by Boddy-Evans, an art tutor and freelance writer (2018), “Marks are not just used to form the pictures that artists create, they are also used to add expression to the work.” And “Artists can use slashes as marks to express anger or curves as marks to express calm or peace.”

Despite how she is actually bathed in light where she is sitting, giving the impression that she may not be doing too badly, the leaf representing her hope being located in such a dark corner of the page really gives the story a deeper meaning and certainly, a gloomier edge.



Finally, the character returns home to her bedroom, and the reader is reminded that this character has simply travelled through their day as they do every day, and that this is a normal occurrence for them; they will probably wake up and go through the same emotions tomorrow. This is particularly pertinent of depression as it is easy for someone suffering to get lost and have to fight countless battles against

themselves on a regular basis. The room however, is exactly as she left it further backing up my initial point of it being her safety net, and that the monotony of it is actually a positive element of her life.

However, there is one thing different about her room; there is a small tree beginning to sprout, almost as a reward for her troubles and efforts. It symbolises her hope beginning to grow, and the start of a new journey of healing. Appropriately put by Beidermann (1989) in his book *Dictionary of Symbolism* 'The tree symbolizes life lived in accordance to God's plan. Its annual cycle refers to life, death and resurrection.' This character's life is certainly about to be resurrected for the better.

Conclusion

This book is incredibly rich in its variety of illustrations, and the way in which it presents depression is both realistically and delicately realized. The clever use of colour and symbolism accurately represent how one can feel when suffering with mental illness. Every small detail and inclusion is done in such a way that the reader feels the emotions and thoughts right along with the girl; as they follow her through the journey against her own mind. The way the book is so skilfully presented helps to immerse the reader in the expedition without there being a typically told story at all as there are actually very few words used at all. This, however, only strengthens of the book, as, when paired with the surrealist imagery, it means each individual can relate to the story in a way which is personal to them. This helps to prompt questions from both adult and child as they read through, adequately inviting the first conversations on such a difficult topic.

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