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Narrative Empathy in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*

An approach to teaching these works in upper secondary school in Norway

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Abstract

The following thesis uses Toni Morrison's two novels *Beloved* and *Home* to demonstrate how multiple narrative perspectives can be used to prevent as well as evoke reader's empathy. Furthermore, the thesis suggests using her work in upper secondary school to teach students about how narrative perspectives might manipulate empathy, which can enable them to reflect upon how different perspectives affect them emotionally in real life. Morrison's works contain multiple focalizers and complex narrative structures, which complicate readers' empathy. Morrison challenges the ethical stands of her readers through the representation of complicated traumatic events in *Beloved* and *Home*. Judylyn S. Ryan writes that Morrison's techniques "add complexity to the reader's interrogation and interpretation of motivation" (Ryan 159), and this thesis uses her novels to show how she questions the limitation of human empathy. The research in the field of narrative empathy is expanding, and academics from different fields disagree about two central questions when it comes to narrative empathy; (1) whether or not narrative empathy leads to altruistic behaviour, and (2) which narrative techniques are most effective for the cultivation of readers' empathy. Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* and Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity* are the thesis' major theoretical sources. Whereas Nussbaum considers narrative imagination as essential to the process of becoming a more empathetic citizen, Keen is more critical of theories confirming that narrative empathy leads to altruistic behaviour. Keen claims that the lack of empiric research in these approaches weakens the empathy-altruism theory. The thesis' didactical approach concerns the importance of literature when teaching upper secondary students in Norway. It argues that analysing narrative perspectives used for manipulation of readers' empathy, by either enforcing or problematizing it, is important for awareness of these manipulations in real life as well.

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1. Introduction

What we do as writers and critics is not just important, it is crucial; it is not just informative, it is formative; it is not just interesting, it profoundly shapes the perception of the world as we, and others, come to “know” it.
(Tally 1)

The epigraph above is Justine Tally’s summary of Toni Morrison’s view on the social importance of literature. Toni Morrison is an author recognized for her unique work portraying African-American history in the US. She is also known for creating complex characters and problematizing ethics through difficult dilemmas represented through several narrative perspectives. This thesis investigates how she complicates reader’s empathy in her two novels *Beloved* and *Home* by using multiple perspectives. I further argue that attentiveness to how perspectives affect empathy might make students of upper secondary school more reflective about different perspectives in real life. They might also become more conscious about their own limitations of empathy. How a narrative is presented to the reader influences how she responds to it emotionally. I claim this could be transferable to real life as well; how a person or an event is presented impacts one’s emotional response to that person or event.

Narrative empathy and the developmental effect of reading novels are expanding areas of research. Much of the disagreement concerns fiction’s contribution to altruism – whether or not being an empathetic reader helps a person becoming a compassionate citizen. In order to show how Morrison complicates reader’s empathy in her work, I rely on theory mainly by Martha Nussbaum and Suzanne Keen. They differ in their opinions about the developmental effect of narrative empathy in real life, and also in their methodologies of researching the matter. Whereas Nussbaum values narrative imagination as one of three central steps in the

cultivation of humanity, Keen is more critical of the developmental effect of literature in real life. Keen focuses on empirical research that has investigated the emotional effect different narrative techniques have on readers.

The thesis is an integrated work in the fields of literary criticism and didactics. The didactical aim is to show the importance of teaching literature in high school for the purpose of heightening the level of students' attentiveness to perspectives, and how these perspectives affect their empathy. Awareness of perspectives is very important for young adults living in a global world, with a population that consists of major cultural differences. *Beloved* can be considered a more challenging novel for students than *Home*, because of its length and complex structure. A choice between the two novels therefore gives the opportunity for differentiation. The individual teacher can choose between the works through an evaluation of the average academic level of the class, or she can let each student decide which novel to read.

The subsequent chapter (chapter 2) is theoretical. Here I present Martha Nussbaum's work on the narrative imagination and some of Suzanne Keen's findings on how narrative techniques affect reader's empathy. I will also define central terms like empathy, difficult empathy and implied readership, and clarify how these will be used throughout the thesis. Furthermore, I will present the theory of the zone of proximal development by Lev Vygotsky, together with Bakhtin's focus on dialogic learning, which will be important for the thesis' didactics chapter. Finally, I will give a brief introduction to Toni Morrison's authorship in terms of multiple perspectives and narrative empathy before I move on to a literary analysis of her most recognized work, *Beloved*.

In chapter 3: "Multiple Perspectives in *Beloved*," I discuss how the multiple perspectives on Sethe's infanticide, the narrative distancing through isolation of characters, and the extremity of trauma complicate reader's empathy with Sethe. I will discuss how

Morrison challenges the idea of truth, by demonstrating its diversity through the characters within the novel. Based on these elements I will argue that the reader cannot fully empathize with the protagonist because of the emotional distance that emerges between them.

Chapter 4 provides a literary analysis of Morrison's fairly recent novel *Home*, a novel with a less complicated structure of focalisation than *Beloved*, but that contains a challenging narrative frame, which complicates reader's empathy. I will draw comparisons to *Beloved* on how perspectives in *Home* have resembling and different effects on the reader.

I will argue that Morrison's message in the end is the same, which is to show how the lack of situational mapping with personal trauma and the multiplicity of truth make it difficult for anyone, including her implied reader, to truly empathize with the protagonists.

Chapter 5 is the didactic chapter of the thesis. Here I will focus on students of Norwegian "videregående skole" level 12 and 13 (VKII and VKIII), when students are in the age group of 17-19 years. I will refer to "videregående skole" as upper secondary school. In this chapter I discuss how the novels in chapter 3 and 4 could be used to practice attentiveness to narrative perspective, in relation with reader's empathy. Furthermore, I discuss the importance of teaching awareness of different perspectives, in light of students' social development and the core curriculum. Even though I acknowledge that it is difficult to prove empirically that novel reading makes a citizen more altruistic, I argue that the practise students get by studying how different perspectives affect them in *Beloved* and *Home* could help them become more reflective about similar manipulations in society.

2. Theory

The concept of narrative empathy is studied not only by literary critics but also by critics in several other disciplines like philosophy, psychology and neuroscience. “[L]iterary empathy studies consider both how writers represent empathetic experience and how they provoke, promote or prevent empathy in readers” (Hammond and Kim 1). Theorists disagree on whether or not empathic responses to narratives affect similar emotions in real life. There are also conflicting opinions about how one should approach this question. I will now provide a brief outline of central theories and questions concerning the emotional effect of literature and clarify my understanding of terms central to the thesis before including some theory for the teaching of narrative empathy and literature in upper secondary school. Finally, I give a brief presentation of Toni Morrison’s authorship and a justification of choosing *Beloved* and *Home* for this thesis.

2.1 Martha Nussbaum and the narrative imagination

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum is an acknowledged theorist in the field of philosophy and humanities, who has “stressed the value of novel reading for the cultivation of empathy” (Hogan *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories* 245). She has presented grand works on emotional studies and found the concept of narrative imagination very important in the cultivation of world citizenship. Her approach is mainly philosophical, but is also pedagogical. In *Cultivating Humanity* she argues that narrative imagination, acquired by studying controversial literary works, is one of three essential abilities one must have in order to become an open-minded world citizen: First, is the capacity to be critical towards oneself and one’s traditions. The second is the ability to see human beings as a whole and not as separate groups; understanding how “common needs and aims are differently realized in

different circumstances” (Nussbaum 10). The third capacity is the narrative imagination, which is the one central to this thesis.

Narrative imagination is the ability to imagine what it is like to be in a person’s place, even if that person is very different from oneself. This capacity, Nussbaum argues, is best acquired through fiction:

[T]he first step of understanding the world from the point of view of the other is essential to any responsible act or judgement, since we do not know what we are judging until we see the meaning of an action as the person intends it, the meaning of speech as it expresses something of importance in the context of that person’s history and social world. (11)

The capacity to understand and reflect upon perspectives different than those we already inhabit can be rehearsed through fiction. Through literature the reader has the opportunity to investigate thoughts and feelings of another, and also to be critical of those thoughts and feelings. Allowing oneself to mentally be in the position of a character in fiction is less challenging for a student than to do the same with a person one has just met on the street. Through literature, the reader can therefore explore the meaning behind another’s actions more thoroughly.

Nussbaum believes that this opportunity to “look inside” the character’s mind also allows the student to take a necessary step back. With this she means to reflect upon “whether the person’s own judgement has taken the full measure of what has happened” (91). This step back contributes to a better understanding of individuals who appear to be different from us. Furthermore, she claims that narrative imagination teaches us to become more reflective human beings in real life. In order for students to develop this imaginative ability, she

emphasises that “we must encourage them to read critically; not only to empathize and experience, but also to ask critical questions about that experience” (100). To accomplish this, she argues, one must teach novels that problematize empathy for characters. Nussbaum explains, “[i]f we can easily sympathize with a character, the invitation to do so has relatively little moral value” (98). Only when forced to leave the comfort zone of what is morally accepted can one develop an open-minded world citizenship. This is also why she believes that it is important to teach literature that “challenges conventional wisdom and values” (99).

The novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright is one of Nussbaum’s most frequent examples of important unconventional literature that challenges reader’s empathy. To be able to empathize with the young African-American protagonist “who kills his lover Bessie more casually than he kills a rat” is extremely difficult (Nussbaum 98). The dissonance between the alternating perspectives of newspaper articles and the narrated monologues of Bigger Thomas makes it even more challenging for the reader to empathize. Similar dissonance emerges in *Beloved* where Toni Morrison challenges the reader to look past the brutal portrayals of Sethe killing her own baby girl and try to empathize with Sethe as she portrays herself as an advocate of freedom. But at the same time, Morrison prevents this empathy from fully taking place by repeating the event through the critical perspectives of other characters.

Suzanne Keen critiques Nussbaum and other theorists in favour of the empathy-altruism theory, claiming that findings on the altruistic effect of narrative empathy are “inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated in favour of the beneficial effects of novel reading” (*Empathy and the Novel* vii). Like Nussbaum, I believe that by teaching these unconventional novels, one challenges the students to be more attentive to perspectives by people different from themselves, but I also agree with Keen on that the altruistic effect of narrative empathy in general is too vaguely tested to say something certain about it. I will

now continue with some of Keen's contribution to studies of narrative empathy to give a more nuanced picture of the matter.

2.2 Suzanne Keen's research on narrative empathy

Suzanne Keen "has studied recent writings on emotion [more] broadly and deeply" than Nussbaum has (Hogan *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories* 14). Her interdisciplinary work takes a critical approach to the connection between narrative empathy and altruistic behaviour. One of her main arguments is that fiction provides a safe place for readers, allowing us to distance ourselves from our moral beliefs and values. Therefore, we can empathize with fiction without feeling any need for altruistic action in real life (*Empathy and the Novel* 88).

Much of Keen's work concerns investigating research and theories on specific narrative techniques that can be effective in invoking reader's empathy. Her work is based on findings from a diversity of research on the emotional effects of reading. She separates two main areas in which cultivation of reader's empathy occurs, through character identification and narrative situation (including point of view and perspective). Character identification is not a manipulative technique that an author can use to cultivate empathy, but happens within the reader herself. However, the author can attempt to manipulate empathy through the narrative situation, which includes:

the nature of the mediation between the author and the reader, including the person of the narration, the implicit location of the narrator, the relation of the narrator to the characters, and the internal and external perspective on characters, including in some cases the style of representation of characters' consciousness. (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 93)

In Toni Morrison's works she uses complex narrative voices and perspectives, as much to problematize empathy as to invoke it. In *Narrative Form*, Keen points out that "[t]he manipulation of narrative situation is one of the most useful strategies possessed by fiction writers to elicit sympathy, to command respect, and to unleash the complicated effects that go by the name of irony" (32). The choice of narrative perspective can be important for reader's empathy. "A commonplace of narrative theory suggests that an internal perspective best promotes character identification" (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 96). Tense, the use of analepses, and characterizations are all among narrative techniques that may influence how the reader emotionally responds to a character. The way internal representations of characters are presented through third-person narrations might also affect how the reader responds to the characters. Wayne Booth claims, "a psychic vividness of prolonged and deep inside views" can help an author achieve "intense sympathy" for a character who would not otherwise get sympathy easily from the reader (377-378). Furthermore, theorists have found that representation of characters' thoughts through "narrated monologue has a strong effect on readers' responses" (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 96). In narrated monologue the character's thoughts are presented within the tense and perspective of the narrator. We see examples of narrated monologues in Toni Morrison's work where these multiple internal perspectives affect the reader's emotions towards the protagonists.

2.3 Some contemporary views on narrative empathy

Narrative empathy is empathetic emotion towards narratives. Empathy is a term closely related to sympathy or compassion, and the two are commonly used in relation to each other. In *Empathy and The Novel*, Keen "distinguish[es] the spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling as *empathy*, and the more complex, differentiated feeling for another

as *sympathy*” (*Empathy and the Novel* 4). I will use Keen’s definition of the terms, and treat empathy as the ability to put oneself in another’s place and fully manage to understand their situation. Empathy in itself is morally neutral whereas sympathy is not. For Patrick Colm Hogan “to empathize with someone is to put oneself in his/her place, and that substitution presupposes something that is shared” (“The Epilogue of Suffering: Heroism, Empathy, Ethics” 134). Hogan distinguishes two separate ways in which this sharing can occur.

The first he calls categorical empathy, which is empathy based on the empathizer and sufferer sharing a categorical trait – for instance gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, age and so on. This is the weaker kind of empathy, rarely leading to compassion because it is group-related and not based on individual mapping of feelings (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 95). The other is situational empathy, which occurs when the reader has a memory of a similar situation or feeling to that of the sufferer (Hogan “The Epilogue of Suffering: Heroism, Empathy, Ethics” 137). Following Hogan, situational empathy is the form of empathy that more likely leads to sympathy or empathetic concern, because of its reliance on “a reader having a memory of comparable experience” (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 96).

As Hogan points out, the emotional response that empathy leads to is often triggered by how we place ourselves in relation to the one we empathize with. If the reader considers herself inferior to the character, this may lead to idolization. If she values herself and the character as equals, the reader will most likely be compassionate or sympathetic. A compassionate response requires an “it could have been me” feeling within the reader. Third, if the reader values the character as inferior to herself the emotional response will most likely be of pity (Hogan *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion* 276-78).

A different aspect distinguishes difficult empathy from easy empathy. Eric Leake points out the developmental effect of difficult empathy in literature and the distinction from easy empathy:

Whereas an easy empathy does not require much of a stretch and can suggest a complete grasp, a difficult empathy pushes the limits of our understanding in reaching out to those with whom we might not otherwise wish contact or association. (Leake 176)

Difficult empathy will be a central term to this thesis because it is the only kind a reader socially develops from, according to Nussbaum. Manipulative narrative perspectives, unconventional narrators, shifting types of narration are all techniques that can make the empathetic response difficult for the reader (Leake 176-178). For instance, the first-person narrator and nymphomaniac, Humbert Humbert, in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* addresses the reader directly and asks for her empathy. Because of his level of reflection the reader will most likely at some point empathize with Humbert, and at the same time be repelled by her own response as well as the incidents portrayed by the narrator. Difficult empathy challenges the moral, cultural and ethical principles of the reader, and often prevents the reader from holding on to initial ethical stands.

Empathy might lead to emotional responses such as compassion, idolization or pity, but Suzanne Keen's point of empathy leading to personal distress for the reader is just as important to recognize. One might respond to a narrative by distancing oneself completely from the "provocative condition of the other" (Keen "A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 208). Hogan refers to similar situation as blocked mapping. This is a situation that occurs when the categorical or situational distance between the character and the reader becomes so extensive that no shared mapping occurs between them (Hogan *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion* 138).

The line between difficult empathy and emotional blocking for the reader can be problematic. Events or characters that are perceived as challenging for one reader can be totally repelling for another. When reading *Lolita* I found myself wanting to close the book at several occasions, to distance myself from the narrative because it made me feel emotionally sick. For me this was in some ways a fascinating feeling, and it made me curious about how Nabokov managed to construct that situation for me as a reader. For another reader however, the shadiness and immorality of the content, and the way it is narrated might lead to personal distress and aversion towards the whole narrative, causing her to stop reading (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 19). It is important to acknowledge that narrative empathy is very individual and that it therefore is difficult to say much about how a specific reader will respond to a narrative. This brings me to implied readership. In this thesis, the analysis is based on implied readership and not on empirical testing of real-reader responses. I will explain the term more closely.

Acknowledging an implied reader's presence in the text allows us look beyond the diversity of responses of all individual readers and concentrate on the text itself. The idea of an implied reader as a counterpart to the implied author is a concept introduced by Wayne C. Booth. The implied reader is "the author's image of the recipient that is fixed and objectified in the text by specific indexical signs" (Schmid Paragraph 2). She is an imagined recipient that has an ideal understanding of the work, or contains the qualities that the work proposes its reader to have. When acknowledging the presence of an implied reader, literary critics can interpret within the text itself how narrative strategies are used to affect the reader's emotions (Schmid paragraph 10). This presence does not ignore individual readership and the knowledge that real readers' responses are diverse and differ from the response implied by the work. While Nussbaum and Booth use the concept of an implied reader to a larger extent to

make their claims, Keen's work is based on real individual readers' responses and scientific trials of neuroscience.

2.4 Dialogue and social interaction in the learning process: Vygotsky and Bakhtin

Central to the didactics chapter of this thesis is social development theory and Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Vygotsky believes that learning goes from the social to the individual, which he explains through the model of proximal development. The model has two main zones: **the inner zone**, which illustrates how much the student can learn by herself, and **the outer zone**, which shows how much the student can manage with the help of a teacher and fellow students (Imsen 258-60). The model illustrates how much further a student can develop with the help of a person that knows more than the student herself. For Vygotsky, the teacher's higher level of competence has a central role in the student's learning process. He also claims that learning is a result of social interactions and challenging tasks. The student must therefore be challenged to reach to a higher level of knowledge through difficult tasks, placed within the zone of proximal development. With this method the limits of each zone will expand little by little, and the student will be able to solve more challenging tasks independently and therefore extend the potential for development with guidance from an adult or more capable students (Imsen 260).

"Vygotsky emphasizes that the task and the learning must be adapted to the actual developmental level of the [student]" and is therefore a central theorist to the emphasis on students' right to adapted education (Ibsen and Wiland 140). In order to expand the zone of proximal development the teacher must acknowledge what each individual student can do alone and what she can do with help from the teacher and fellow students. I use Vygotsky's theory in my thesis both because of the complexity of Morrison's narratives, and because

practicing to imagine different perspectives requires cooperation between the students and the teacher in order to expand each student's ability to do this.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin is also a central theorist who promotes learning through social interactions. According to Gunn Imsen, Bakhtin sees interaction through language (utterances) as the central part of the learning process. An utterance does not only include the voice it comes from but also the receiver of the utterance. To create a meaningful dialogue in the classroom, students and teachers must have a mutual understanding of each other, which does not only include the teacher's understanding of the students, but also the students' understanding of the teacher and each other. In order to for the students to learn, the teacher must find an approach to them where their own voice can be present as well (Imsen 291-93). Utterance is a dialogue, and within the novel there is a dialogue between the narrative voice and the imagined voice of the receiver. By expanding this dialogue among fellow students in class, they can also learn from each other's interpretations and perspectives of the novels. When writing about teaching the novels I will therefore focus on the dialogue between the reader and the text, and the students among each other.

2.5 Toni Morrison and narrative perspectives

Toni Morrison is an author whose "novels are multivoiced, multi-layered, writerly and speakerly, both popular and literary highbrow" (Grewal 1). She is referred to as "America's conscience" by several reviewers because of her unique portrayals of the shameful history of slavery, abuse and segregation in America (Hoby). Through her novels, she gives voice to the silenced history of African Americans. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for *Beloved*, and became the first black woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. I believe both *Beloved* and *Home* are works that can help students understand "how a history of racial stereotyping can affect self-esteem, achievement, and love" and further enable them "to make

more informed judgements on issues relating to affirmative action and education” (Nussbaum 88). Morrison is acknowledged for her complex narrations and the deep involvement of her readers (Fultz 3). By alternating narrative perspectives and allowing voices of several different characters to be heard, she has become one of the greatest writers to challenge empathy and to explore its limitations.

Beloved is a work inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who kills one of her children by slicing the infant’s throat with a knife in order to prevent the family from being recaptured into slavery again (Morrison *Beloved* xvii). Throughout the work, Morrison also presents characters’ horrific memories of enslavement. One of the most disturbing memories is Sethe, the protagonist, being raped and abused by her “owners” while she is pregnant with Denver. Shortly after *Beloved* was published, it ended up on the list of best selling novels in America. Later, in 1998, the novel was adapted into a movie starring Oprah Winfrey. The movie did not achieve great popularity.

Home was published in 2012, and was up until recently Morrison’s latest novel. In this short novel we meet Frank Money, an African-American male who fought in the Korean War. He has returned to America and is deeply disturbed by the traumas of warfare. The work contains two distinct narrative voices; the omniscient narrator is terrorized by the protagonist’s strong interferences of her narration. The novel is short, but contains many complex questions and ethical dilemmas for its readers. In his review of *Home*, Ron Charles writes, “[t]his scarily quiet tale packs all the thundering themes Morrison has explored before. She’s never been more concise, thorough, and that restraint demonstrates the full range of her power” (Charles).

In Morrison’s novels the reader must always pay attention to whose perspective she is introduced to, and further reflect upon how this perspective complicates her emotions. This is significant to our empathetic response to her work because the presence of multiple

perspectives becomes such an important part of the ethical judgement of her protagonists. Her works portray how nuances of perspectives, subjectivity of truth and the limitations of empathy problematize our emotional responses as readers. I believe that these novels can challenge students on many levels of competence with guidance from a teacher.

Since Morrison does not provide the ethical answers easily to her reader, her works provide great opportunities for both class discussion and individual interpretations by students in upper secondary school. I have chosen these two works because together they represent some of the diversity of narrative techniques in Morrison's authorship and though they in some ways resemble each other because of the multiple focalisations and traumatic events, they differ in the way they problematize readers' empathy. I have also included *Home* because of its physical length and language, which could make it a good alternative to *Beloved*. *Home* can be a less challenging choice of work, both to read and teach in upper secondary school. Now I will move on to a literary analysis of *Beloved*.

3. Multiple perspectives in *Beloved*

This chapter of the thesis provides an analysis of how narrative situation is manipulated to problematize and challenge reader's empathy in Toni Morrison's famous *Beloved*. I will discuss three main ways in which this is done. First, the narrative situation in terms of narrative voice, perspective and disordering of events manipulates how the reader responds to the plot. In particular, the monologues accruing at the mid-section of the novel (236-256) are powerful ethical devices. These alternating narrative perspectives also illustrate the multiplicity of truth, and challenge the reader's own version of it. Second, by completely isolating major characters (especially protagonist Sethe and her daughter Denver) Morrison distances her reader from them. In this section I claim that isolating individual characters from each other provides a distance from the protagonist that makes empathetic response challenging for the reader. Third, the extremity of the events portrayed causes narrative distancing between the whole narrative and the reader. Morrison alternates familiarity and unfamiliarity in an unpredictable way. This might cause the reader to question the limits of empathy and problematize the emotion of pity. What are the limitations of what we can imagine? Can the extremity of Sethe's experiences lead to anything other than pity or personal distress for the reader? Before I approach these themes I will give a brief introduction to the work.

Beloved has had a tremendous impact on the field of African-American literature and is considered an important part of the literary canon. The work is written through several individual memories of Sethe's deed the day Schoolteacher (slave owner) and his men approach Sethe's home to reclaim her and the children as his "property." Sethe collects her four children and runs to the shed to save them from slavery. In the shed she attempts to kill all of them. She severely hurts her two boys and her baby girl, Denver, and manages to kill Beloved, her "crawling already" infant, with a handsaw. We are invited into their "spiteful"

house called 124 in 1873, years after the infanticide took place, when “Sethe and her daughter Denver [are] its only victims” because everybody else has either run off or died (Morrison *Beloved* 3). The baby ghost of Beloved haunts the house. When Sethe and Paul D begin to share the painful stories of their mutual past as slaves at the plantation called Sweet Home, Beloved returns to 124 in physical form, possibly as a symbol of suppressed memory of the past.

Multiple portrayals of Sethe using a handsaw to slice her daughter’s throat, make the reader unable to take a clear ethical stand about this infanticide and question whether or not she can empathize with Sethe. Morrison manipulates the narration by alternating internal and external perceptions of multiple characters, carefully choosing which memory to present at which time. The structure gives an oral effect to the narrative as new perspectives are portrayed, and the ability to empathize with Sethe becomes more and more problematic for the reader throughout the novel. One powerful perspective after another makes the ethical dilemma large, and the reader must always pay attention to whose eyes she sees through.

3.1 Difficult empathy and the narrative situation

Throughout the novel we are presented a fragmented structure that keeps the reader at a distance from the narrative. The plot jumps between past and present as we follow Sethe’s analepses side by side with those of Paul D, Baby Suggs (Sethe’s mother in law), Stamp Paid and Denver. Even though they portray many of the same events, their memories do not come together into a tidy wholeness. Molly A. Travis claims, “[t]he full ethical force of *Beloved*’s design derives from this side-by-side relationship between stories that do not coalesce or resolve themselves into harmony” (Travis 237). It is important for Morrison to tell their perspectives of a shared past separately and equally. This illustrates how these perspectives differ, and also makes a difference to the reader’s perception of Sethe and the infanticide. The

different portrayals of the traumatic time at Sweet Home, particularly those of Paul D and Sethe, show the reader how individual memory is. Morrison gives the reader hints about the infanticide through these memories as well, but it is not until Stamp Paid shows Paul D a notice in the newspaper that the reader understands that the mystery is about to be revealed.

The first revelation of Sethe's infanticide is portrayed through the perspective of the slave owners at Sweet Home. As Schoolteacher and his men approach the shed, the reader sees the event through the eyes of the man who values Sethe as property that reproduces itself. The vision is described through the perspective of a cold antagonist who sees Sethe as an animal "beat beyond the point of education" (Morrison *Beloved* 176):

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby towards the wall planks... Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim... Two were lying open-eyed in the sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one.
(175-176)

As James Phelan argues, the slave catchers' view of the incident in the shed appears insensitive and alien, which makes this first telling of the event "an ethical perspective that [the reader] easily can repudiate" (Phelan 324). However, the portrayal of the incident in itself is gruesome and harsh, and the prior image of Sethe as merely a victim of slavery vanishes for the reader. It becomes clear that Sethe and her family are just broken property that cannot be fixed, to these men. After this insensitive and raw portrayal, Morrison moves to the perspective of Stamp Paid.

Since Stamp Paid portrays the first emotional perspective of the event, this can make him the most dominating agent of ethics in the novel. Through the previous indirect characterization of Stamp Paid, the reader learns to know him as the man who saves Sethe and her baby-Denver from death and starvation when they first arrive from Sweet Home. He is a compassionate and righteous man. Stamp Paid is a man who walks through painful obstacles just to collect the best blackberries for the women in Sweet Home, only to give Denver the first taste of the delicious berries (Morrison *Beloved* 160). The characterization of him alongside his focalization of the infanticide leaves an important impression on the reader.

Stamp Paid's perspective appears more emotionally loaded to the reader because of his relation to Sethe. His memory of the day the infanticide took place however, portrays Sethe's deed as the one of a scared animal. This positions her as inferior to him as well, but as Phelan emphasizes; "he does not reduce her to" an animal, though he does compare her actions to those of one:

[S]natching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way . . . A pretty little slave girl had recognized a hat, and split to the woodshed to kill her children. (185-186)

From Stamp Paid's point of view, Sethe goes from being "a pretty little slave girl" to being a predator to her children. The animalistic behaviour is also what the reader first emotionally responds to. Stamp Paid's emotions towards her are those of pity, not of sympathy. Therefore, Sethe becomes an inferior to the reader as well and a target of pity.

Pity is an emotion directed towards an inferior person, and Morrison lets her implied reader become conscious of this emotion created through the eyes of Stamp Paid. "To respond

with compassion, [the reader] must be willing to entertain the thought that the suffering person might be [her]” (Nussbaum 91). If the reader places herself above the character she will not be able to respond with compassion, but rather with pity. This is what the reader is most likely to do because of the inferior portrayal of Sethe: first innocent as a “pretty little slave girl” and then fierce like a “hawk.” As Hogan states, “[w]e may have still greater pity if we imagine [Sethe] to lack the capacities to act appropriately in response to the fear and the [moral] principles” (*What Literature Teaches us about Emotions* 280). Stamp Paid’s emotions towards Sethe seem to be those of “greater pity.” In his eyes Sethe loses the capacity to think straight and act morally because of her fear of enslavement.

The narrator then moves over to Sethe’s own explanation. For the reader this is the version that finally will “provide some resolution to the tension” Morrison has built up through earlier “partial, indirect and cryptic references” to the infanticide (Phelan 323). As Paul D protests several times when looking at the newspaper: “But this ain’t her mouth... This ain’t it at all,” and he is absolutely right, the story is not the one of Sethe, but the one of the society around her (Morrison *Beloved* 184). The perspective the reader craves is Sethe’s own “mouth.” The only problem is that Sethe can “never close in, pin it down for anybody who [has] to ask” (192). Therefore, Morrison leaves out the emotional description from Sethe of what exactly happened in the shed.

By placing her reader in the difficult situation of not being led in any certain ethical direction by the narrator, Morrison distances her reader from the incident itself. While the reader in some ways is driven to look for reasons to forgive Sethe’s deed through the previous sympathetic portrayals of her traumatic past, she is kept from doing this by the characters who either condemn Sethe or distance themselves from her actions. As Phelan points out, moving

from the white men's to Stamp Paid's to Sethe's [perspective], is a progression towards increasingly sympathetic views. [Therefore] we might be inclined to conclude that Morrison is guiding us toward accepting Sethe's version...But the triangulation of all three stories indicates that Morrison does not want Sethe's story to be the authoritative version because that triangulation calls attention to what Sethe leaves out of her account: the handsaw, the slit throat, the blood, the swinging of the baby toward the wall. (Phelan 326)

Sethe's own perception of the death of Beloved is quite different from what is portrayed by the others. She is no longer a trapped animal, but a fighter for justice, which makes her perspective more sympathetic. Stamp Paid believes that "in her own mind she is acting as the altruistic mother, "trying to outhurt the hurter"" (Fultz 69). Sethe claims to Paul D that she made the only right choice that day. She kept the children from death by enslavement, which is a powerful claim that would impose sympathetic response. The problem is, as Phelan points out, that she leaves out the horror that the other portrayals call attention to. This, together with Sethe's later comment to Beloved, "[t]hey stopped me from getting us there, but they didn't stop you from getting here. Haha" makes it difficult to sympathize with her because of the brutality of the deed itself (Morrison *Beloved* 239). Her perspective causes the implied reader to feel, as the people watching her step in to the cart to prison, that "her head [is] a bit too high" and "her back a little too straight" for a mother who has murdered her own baby girl (179).

3.1.1 Interior monologues and the "emblematic power of the narrative"

In the interior monologues of Sethe, Denver and Beloved at the very end of the second part of the novel, Morrison grants them their own free space to tell their versions of the truth.

Travis calls this shift in structure “emblematic of the ethical power of the novel,” because of how their voices are put in “counterpoint” to each other, to symbolize the multiplicity of ethics and truth (Travis 237).

When Sethe discovers that Beloved is her returned daughter, she is determined to make Beloved understand her choice of killing her and explains “[h]ow *if [she] hadn’t killed her she would have died* and that is something [Sethe] could not bear to happen to her” (Morrison *Beloved* 236 italics by me). Being free from slavery makes her a person, entitled to love her own children because they are hers to love. Going back to slavery turns her and the children into the “property” the schoolteacher describes. Lifeless “things” or “dogs” with nothing of their own to love. Therefore, her definition of *dying* is the loss of safety and freedom at Sweet Home. She will not let her children go back to the hell she fought so hard to save them from, and *killing them* means saving them from that hell. Sethe becomes an active agent of freedom in her own eyes.

Through Sethe’s reasoning of the infanticide, Morrison also reminds her reader of the limitations of our empathy. When reflecting upon Paul D’s disapproval of her choice, Sethe again refers back to the abusive life of enslavement: “I have felt what it felt like and nobody walking or stretched out is going to make you feel it too. Not you, not none of mine, and when I tell you you mine, I also mean I’m yours” (239). It is difficult to follow Sethe in her reasoning because of how brutally she kills Beloved when all she wants is to keep her safe. The reader, understanding that she cannot identify with Sethe’s reasoning, “also notice[s] differences in the inner world, seeing the delicate interplay between common human goals and the foreignness that can be created by circumstances” (Nussbaum 95). In Sethe’s monologue even the reader with the categorical connection of motherhood falls short of identification. Loving motherhood and infanticide do not fit together, so the reader “is not

going to feel,” like Sethe. Sethe’s reasoning is based on a history of oppression, which the reader realizes that she cannot empathize with.

From Sethe, the narrative voice moves over to Denver’s monologue, which in isolation has empathetic impact on the reader. Denver’s story is the one that invokes the most sympathy within the reader. Her voice is pure and innocent and it also contains the most consistent structure. She is hopeful of her father’s return. She longs for a sister to love. She has a genuine fear of being killed by her mother (Morrison *Beloved* 242). Loss of a close relative, love for a sibling, and fear of death are all traits that imply fundamentals for situational empathy. Keen writes that “a character’s negative affective states, such as those provoked by undergoing prosecution, suffering, grieving and experiencing painful obstacles, make a reader’s empathizing more likely” (*Empathy and the Novel* 71). Denver as merely a victim is easier to empathize with for the reader.

It is no coincidence that Denver is the one who portrays her mother’s story of, “what it took [Sethe] to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hands...to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored baby, plump and sweet with life” (Morrison *Beloved* 295). This is probably the most emotional passage of the novel, full of compassion. For a minute the implied reader is lead to feel that Sethe addresses the reader herself, until Morrison reminds her, “this and much more had Denver heard her say [to Beloved]” (296). Still, Morrison has not given a direct perspective from Sethe on the murder, and even though the reader sympathizes with Denver’s retelling, it is not Sethe’s own “voice” this time either. Sethe is only capable of telling the truth to Beloved, because she believes Beloved already has forgiven her and can understand her. Sethe says, “I’ll explain to her, even though I don’t have to...[S]he understands everything already” (237). This indicates that Sethe can only explain to somebody who has already forgiven her and Beloved is the only one in the position to do so.

The three sections, ending with *Beloved*'s stream of consciousness, demonstrate how ethical power lays within the equality of the perspectives, which do not fit or make up one whole (Travis 237). "Beloved, she my daughter" (Morrison *Beloved* 237), "Beloved is my sister" and "I am Beloved, and she is mine" are the first sentences of each of their "chapters" and show the women's equal rights to ownership of their stories (242, 248, 253). The lines ending this narrative structure: "I loved you/You hurt me/ You came back to me/You left me/ I waited for you"(256) illustrate how they contradict each other. Finally, the echoes of voices, which we cannot identify, "you are mine / You are mine /You are mine" crash into each other. The reader feels like the characters speak directly to her, demanding her attention and demanding sympathy. But what the voices are saying does not provide a complete true answer to the reader's moral questions. The inconsistency in this narrative situation is a powerful empathetic device and in its multiplicity it works against the claims of easy empathy with a first person perspective.

3.1.2 Inconsistency and multiple perspectives

The characters' perspectives of Sethe together make it difficult to imagine what it is like to be her, because of the ambiguity in how she is portrayed. Is she the animal Stamp Paid paints a picture of? Is she a murderous madwoman who will cut her children's throat in their sleep, as Denver portrays? Or is she a mother of unconditional love for her children, who saved them from death, as she herself thinks? As Travis points out, "[t]he design of Morrison's narrative calls for identification with Sethe, while also ultimately making that identification impossible" (Travis 236). Identification with Sethe becomes impossible because we have seen her and her actions through the contradicting perspectives of fear, pity, sympathy and judgement.

The order in which the perspectives occur also prevents empathy. In *Rhetoric of Fiction* Wayne Booth claims “[i]f granting to the hero the right to reflect his own story can insure the reader’s sympathy, withholding it from him and giving it to another character can prevent too much identification” (282). Morrison does not completely withhold Sethe’s perspective from the reader, but by granting so much space to portrayals of her deed by other characters before Sethe’s own, she withholds Sethe’s voice enough to prevent easy identification with her.

Through this inconsistent structure Morrison also shows us that in order to become reflective world citizens we should not choose consistency in our perception of the world, but rather challenge ourselves to see other people’s perspectives. Keen writes that several studies find “that readers certainly express preferences about point of view and prefer consistency over inconsistency” when they choose works to read, in order to achieve easy identification with the characters (*Empathy and the Novel* 98). Toni Morrison prevents any easy identification with Sethe, by denying her reader this consistency. “Rather than privileging any one character’s view and the values upon which it is based, Morrison asks us to enter into each character’s consciousness and to recognize the validity of his or her feelings and judgements” (Phelan 323). This inconsistency becomes uncomfortable, but truthful and real. By this Morrison also portrays that humanity is inconsistent and that truth itself is subjective.

Through these alternating perspectives Morrison demonstrates the multiplicity of truth. The perspectives we are introduced to are telling a truth, not the same truth - but each a version of it. Morrison, through this work, illustrates how truth comes in the way of itself through its multiple shapes and colours. For instance, for Baby Suggs the truth is that the infanticide is not in her power to condemn or approve and for Paul D “there are too many things to feel about [Sethe]” (Morrison *Beloved* 321). What is then supposed to become the reader’s truth? Does she empathize with Sethe, or is the distance between them too large?

3.2 Characters in isolation and limitations of empathy

Through the subjective minds of the characters, the reader learns to know them as individuals and not a suppressed group of runaway slaves. This is important for cultivation of reader's empathy because, as the results of the social study "identifiable victim effect" by Thomas Schelling show, people in general are more willing to help and empathize with individuals than with groups (Harrison 137-138). A common advantage of novels in general is this ability to overcome "group identity" by individualizing characters belonging to a categorical group. It is easier for us to recognize individual subjective experiences and empathize with these. Hogan also confirms this by recognizing categorical empathy as less likely to lead to compassion and altruism than situational empathy.

The ability to individualize characters is generally an effective tool for writers to cultivate readers' empathy. However, Morrison goes to such extremes in the act of individualizing her characters that she instead prevents empathetic response because of the distance created between characters and reader. "Beginning with the first paragraph of the novel, readers encounter fragmentation in the images of a shattered mirror and ghostly handprints, but more importantly in the separation of one family member from the other" (Travis 234). The characters are not just individualized, but they also become completely isolated from each other and the society around them. Despite the fact that the characters' individual memories also portray that many of them have experienced similar trauma, they cannot fully empathize with each other. Therefore, their perspectives become "jagged pieces that do not fit comfortably together" (Travis 234). This dissonance becomes emotionally chaotic for the reader.

A situation of extreme solitude emerges for the protagonist, a solitude that also affects the reader. With Sethe unable to explain the infanticide in a way that makes any of the other characters understand her, they begin to take their distance from her "thick love," and so does

Morrison's implied reader. The infanticide separates Sethe from the society around her as well. Her memory of how their house went from a busy place where people came and went to the extreme solitude it is in now invites situational empathy from the reader. White folks from Sweet Home arrive, "leaving the 124 desolate and exposed at the very hour when everybody stopped dropping by" (Morrison *Beloved* 192). Paul D also distances himself from her when he finally accepts the truth of that newspaper article. Travis points out that even he, who loves her, becomes afraid of her love.

Denver seems to be the one most distanced from Sethe emotionally, and is also isolated on her own. Denver believes that she must "spen[d] all of [her] outside self loving [Sethe]" so Sethe does not kill her (Morrison *Beloved* 245). The reader comes to feel this isolation when Denver portrays how she forgot her mother's crime for a while, until Nelson Lord asked her about it, and Denver had to "ask [Sethe] if it was true". The psychological distance between the women has become so long that Denver cannot "hear her [mother's] answer." After this event everything becomes "so quiet" for Denver (243). Denver and Sethe together also become isolated in the house, away from the community around them in that "nobody – but nobody visit[s] that house" and Denver never leaves it, because of her fear of "it" happening again (217, 242). When *Beloved* returns Denver's life revolves around keeping *Beloved* with her, but as Sethe discovers that *Beloved* is her returned daughter, Denver is again left in solitude. "[Sethe and *Beloved*] cut Denver out of the games... [Sethe] cut Denver out completely. Even the song that she used to sing to Denver she sang for *Beloved* alone" (282).

The reader also feels the women's isolation portrayed through Paul D. We get a powerful picture of Sethe's solitude through his perspective. He reminds her, "[y]our boys gone you don't know where. One girl is dead; the other one won't leave the yard" (194). It is clear that the reality of her situation through his eyes is quite different than through her own.

She is completely isolated. For Paul D it seems like Sethe has lost everything by “choosing” her freedom. And like him, the reader cannot let go of the thought that “there could have been a way. Some other way” than to kill her children (194). When Paul D takes this distance to her love this way, even after his experience with slavery and abuse, the reader is left with little hope of closing down the distance between her and the protagonist as well.

The distance between the reader and protagonist when the infanticide is revealed, like the one between Paul D and Sethe, becomes a “forest [that is] locking the distance between them, giving it shape and heft” (194). The reader’s response to this forest of isolation can be divided. On one hand, the reader becomes distanced to Sethe as well; if Sethe’s own family is incapable of understanding her because “If they didn’t get it right off – she could never explain” (192). How can the reader then claim to empathize, or even sympathize with her?

On the other hand, Sethe’s solitude does invoke sympathy within the reader and the situational empathy of loneliness and fear. However, the extremity of this fear still distances her from the other characters. As readers we might generally empathize more easily on a personal level, but when the isolation of the character becomes so extreme that even the other characters are completely distanced, it problematizes the reader’s empathy for Sethe.

Morrison carefully closes in some of the distance between Sethe and the other characters, and therefore also partially with the implied reader. For instance, when Stamp Paid approaches 124 again, and when the community arrives to drive away the bad spirit in 124, they slowly close in the distance between them and 124 (303). At the very end of the novel when Paul D approaches the house for the second time, he makes an attempt to understand Sethe. The ending is a powerful moment in which the two reconcile and join hands. One can wonder whether this also is the moment when the reader should join hands with Sethe as well.

[Paul D] walks to the front door and opens it. It is stone quiet... Paul D steps inside... There are too many things to feel about this woman... He wants to put his story next to hers... He leans over and takes her hand... his holding fingers are holding hers. (318-322)

The emotional image of two damaged souls holding hands is a powerful symbol of togetherness. Paul D makes a moving attempt to imagine being in Sethe's place, not to judge or pity her but to understand and comfort her as her equal. Here, Morrison creates an important picture of human empathy and shows its healing effect only when it is based on equality. Empathy in itself is neutral, and the goodness of it only comes through acknowledgement of difference. When Paul D attempts to put his story next to Sethe's and "not over, not under, not within, but next to," Morrison asks her reader to do the same (Travis 237). Like him, even though the reader tries to understand Sethe, the best she can do is to acknowledge Sethe's version, but she cannot relate to it or approve the deed itself.

It is an understatement to say that it is difficult *to imagine* the life of a mother who kills her own infant with a saw, *to feel* the stories of characters who have been tortured and deprived of their freedom in the most cruel ways, *to understand* Denver's fear of being beheaded in her sleep by her own mother. The extremity of the events these characters altogether portray in the most normalized way makes it difficult to claim the reader's empathy. It is impossible to say that the reader should be able to put herself in their places and be able to feel what they feel. What Morrison gives her readers, is the opportunity to listen to silenced memories, analyse and reflect upon what we cannot relate to and "put our stories next to theirs," because it is important that these stories are heard.

Some of the characters show aversion in their responses to the trauma in the shed. They find that the easiest way to cope, is to distance themselves from it and so they do, one

by one. As Keen writes, “[t]oo much empathy can lead to an aversion to the victims or to the source of information“ (*Empathy and the Novel* 19). Morrison portrays this avoidance most clearly through Baby Suggs. She goes to bed after things get quiet, starts to dream colours, and finally dies. Stamp Paid portrays her as one who has completely given up after witnessing her daughter-in-law’s attempt to “slay the children...If there had been sadness in her eyes [Stamp Paid] would have understood it; but indifference lodged where sadness should have been” (Morrison *Beloved* 209). Indifference is emotional distancing and we also see that Stamp Paid himself takes distance through his physical removal from 124. Paul D’s escape from the house when he learns the truth about Sethe is also an act of aversion to her. As the characters show emotional distancing from Sethe, the reader might want to do the same. However, since she is introduced to so many perspectives the reader simply cannot turn away until she can grasp the whole meaning, which again makes a never-ending circle, because Morrison never gives it to her. Every time Sethe attempts to explain she circles around the event. The sentence that closes the circle in the end of the novel, “[t]his is not a story to pass on” keeps Sethe’s traumas locked inside her, unreachable for the reader (324).

In *Beloved* we see how Toni Morrison complicates, limits, and prevents the reader’s empathy with Sethe through multiple perspectives. This she does by giving voice to several portrayals of the infanticide and by distancing Sethe from other characters, showing her reader how each new perspective complicates what the reader “knows” as the truth.

4. Multiple perspectives in *Home*

In this chapter I will continue to discuss how Morrison both prevents and complicates reader's empathy for her characters through multiple perspectives. This chapter will focus on *Home* and its protagonist Frank Money. I will also draw comparisons to *Beloved* throughout the chapter. I will discuss how the multiplicity of perspectives complicates reader's empathy in three different ways in *Home*. First, through the technique of two conflicting narrative voices, the reader will see Frank's own ignorance to his mental condition. Furthermore, I argue that the irony of Frank's ignorance and the reader's knowledge positions the reader above Frank. This way, Morrison prevents empathy from the reader, and makes Frank an object of pity. Second, through the perceptions of other characters, Morrison portrays their inability to completely empathize with Frank. Also, their inability resembles the distancing from Sethe in *Beloved*. In both works, Morrison creates this distance to portray the limits of our empathy. Third, the changing relationship between Frank and Cee, and Frank and the third-person narrator throughout the novel, strengthen the reader's emotional relationship to Frank in the end. The central question will be whether or not the reader can fully empathize with a character that she cannot trust tells her the whole truth, or knows the truth himself. Whereas there is a variety of scholarly discussion concerning empathy and ethics in *Beloved*, there is little criticism on *Home*. Therefore, much of my findings will be based on my own ideas.

In *Home* we follow the story of Frank Money, an African-American soldier who has returned to America after fighting in the Korean War. The novel portrays his physical journey home, and his mental journey of recovery from traumas of childhood and war. Frank's journey begins with his escape from a hospital, after having received a letter from his sister's friend telling him, "[c]ome fast. She be dead if you tarry" (Morrison *Home* 8). Frank decides, "[n]o more watching people close to [him] die. No more. And not [his] sister. No way" (103).

And so he begins his journey back towards Lotus in Georgia, a place he recalls as “*worse than any battlefield*” (83). Frank’s first-person narration is written in italics in the original text.

4.1 Narrative voices

Frank Money’s voice is the first to break through the pages, a “raw, first-person voice,” subjective and intrusive (Charles). It is arguable that in some ways this Frank is an “unlikable character” with whom the reader resists identification. Toni Morrison refers to herself as the narrator when she talks about *Home* on “Google authors,” and describes Frank Money as a character who constantly interrupts her and refuses to let her narrate in peace. This embedded structure problematizes reader’s empathy with Frank due to the contradicting ways in which he indirectly and directly characterizes himself throughout the novel. His interference with the omniscient narrator’s story leaves an overall nagging image of him. For instance when he recalls the memory of crossing the border to Texas, Frank snaps “[*d*]escribe that if you know how” to the narrator and when he orders her, “[*d*]on’t paint me as some enthusiastic hero,” in the portrayal of him going home to save his sister (Morrison *Home* 41, 84).

The omniscient narrator can be seen as an assumedly objective narrator who “recreates scenes and conveys dialogue in sharp but unadorned prose” (Charles). Her narration by itself represents the story of Frank’s slow process of healing. It soon becomes clear to the reader that Frank is mentally unstable due to his violent behaviour, hallucinations, and constant nightmares. In his summary of “Home” (essay by Morrison), Sämi Ludwig points out that Morrison believes, “[r]ather than *represent* the other, one should *talk* to “them” in order to learn about their inside, the reasons of their mind – which involves a framework of personifying dialogue” (Ludwig 135 italics in original). The combination of narrative voices

in *Home* allows Morrison as a narrator to be in constant dialogue with Frank, which creates this personifying dialogue between them.

The narrative voices of the omniscient narrator and the first-person narrator in alternation problematize each other's aims for empathy. Typically, a first-person narration brings the reader closer to the character, and is often used to elicit reader's empathy through identification with the character (Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 96). However, because of these narrators' disagreements, mainly concerning how to present character-Frank, and because narrator-Frank does not acknowledge the third-person narrator's narration, this "combo" creates an emotional distancing to the implied reader as well. Empathizing with Frank becomes difficult since his first-person voice seems to be unable to recognize himself in the omniscient narration.

The ironic perspective of the third-person narration positions the reader intellectually above the characters, which causes pity. For instance, when Cee arrives at Dr. Beau's house for her first day of work, the narrator foreshadows to the reader the danger Cee awaits. First of all "the doctor himself is the only one who really knows" what she will be working with. Furthermore, his wife states that Dr. Beau "is a scientist and conducts very important experiments" and that "[h]e's no Dr. Frankenstein." Cee replays "dr who?" and notices the comfortable big bed rather than the lack of privacy in her new room (Morrison *Home* 60). As Laura Castor points out, "[w]hereas she views [her room] as a refuge from memories of abuse and abandonment, the reader notices a subtext of anti-communism, racism and misogyny" (Castor 147). The reader understands the danger Cee has put herself in, and Cee does not. This makes her the object of the reader's pity instead of empathy, because the reader cannot take the imaginative role of being Cee and ignore what she already knows. While the reader of *Beloved* pities Sethe through Stamp Paid's focalisation, by viewing her actions as

“animalistic,” the reader pities Cee because of her naïve perception of the situation, which makes her “infantilize” Cee (Hogan *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion* 280).

The repetition of events, through both the third-person and Frank’s first-person voice, portrays Frank’s inability to understand his own condition. We see this clearly through Frank’s dual reflection about an abused couple he notices on the train. The woman has a broken nose after defending her husband outside of a coffee shop. Through the third-person narration the reader senses Frank’s suppressed issues, through his violent thoughts. When he sees the couple, Frank thinks that “[the husband] will beat her when they get home.” Further he reasons with his claim by thinking, “who wouldn’t? ... [The husband] couldn’t protect himself and he couldn’t protect her either, as the rock in her face proved. She would have to pay for that broken nose. Over and over again” (Morrison *Home* 26). This portrays how much Frank’s traumas disturb him. The wounded wife resembles his own failure in protecting his sister and two best friends, in addition to the shame of killing a Korean girl. Through this third-person portrayal of Frank, the reader realizes that Frank’s suppresses his guilt by placing the responsibility on the victims of the traumatic events, even though he does not understand this himself.

When Frank attempts to cover up for what he claims to be a “[n]ot true” portrayal of him a few chapters later, he explains, “*I didn’t think any such thing. What I thought was that he was proud of her but didn’t want to show how proud he was to the other men on the train. I don’t think you know much about love. Or me*”(69). This passage, among several others, illustrates how Frank resents what the narrator portrays about him. It also raises the reader’s awareness of how little Frank realizes about his own emotions and what causes them, which makes the reader pity him for his own ignorance.

As I have portrayed, the reader feels for Frank because of his unawareness of his mental state, which resembles the way the reader views Cee at the doctor’s house. His own

lack of knowledge about his condition leaves the reader unable to empathize with him, because what appears obvious to the reader, Frank is unable to understand. As Adam Smith writes, “we sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion that arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality” (qtd. in Keen *Empathy and the Novel* 44). When the reader tries to put herself in Frank’s position, she will feel pain. However, this pain is not the same as Frank feels, because he is incapable of understanding the severity of his own condition. Therefore, the only emotion the reader can feel is pity.

Also, since Frank cannot recall his motivations or feelings behind his actions, the reader cannot empathize with him. The third-person perspective allows the reader to “stand back” to reflect upon whether or not characters have taken “a full measure of what has happened” (Nussbaum 91). Frank himself is incapable of that due to his inability to remember the most violent of his traumas, “*I really forgot about the burial*” (Morrison *Home* 5). For instance, when Locke asks him how he ended up in the hospital Frank cannot remember: “Had he thrown himself on the ground at the sudden sound of backfire? Perhaps he started a fight with a stranger or started weeping before trees – apologising for acts he had never committed” (15). Empathy is built on shared feelings and standing back with the third-person narrator knowing that Frank cannot remember, makes the implied reader unable to empathize with Frank. As Aitor Ibarrola argues, the “structure of *Home* may be said to follow the discontinuous and unpredictable patterns in which the past is never completely past and in which characters struggle to remember so as to have their lives properly pieced together” (Ibarrola 116). Frank regaining memory of the traumas he has suffered is important for the reader because she cannot empathize without Frank recalling any feelings or motivations.

4.1.1 Focalisations by multiple characters

Morrison's traumatic portrayals of Frank and Cee's childhood elicit sympathy from the reader because it puts them in a negative state similar to Denver's in *Beloved*. Instead of home being a safe place, Frank describes it as "*the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield... Thank lord for the army*" (Morrison *Home* 83-84). First this is due to the memories of a childhood without a safe home, through both the perspectives of Cee and Frank and is confirmed by their evil step-grandmother Lenore's who "poured water instead of milk over the shredded wheat Cee and her brother ate for breakfast" (44). Lenore resents Cee and "only the hatred in the eyes of her brother kept Lenore from slapping her" (88). More violent are their suppressed memories of watching the burial after a "dogfight" between a father and a son, where the son was forced to stab his father to death (139).

Frank's protective emotion towards Cee portrays him as a caregiver and a comforter, which creates a situational empathy from the reader because of the siblings' tight relationship and unconditional love for each other. Several reviewers have pointed out that "the novel's most affecting passages involve Money's devotion to his little sister" (Charles). The portrayals of how Frank watches over his sister are all powerful. Particularly through Cee's depiction of how "Frank put one hand on top of her head, the other at her nape. His fingers, like balm, stopped the trembling and the chill that accompanied it" whenever she was scared (Morrison *Home* 52). This shows Frank's devotion to his little sister. Frank himself confirms this stating, "[Cee] was the first person I ever took responsibility for" (105).

Through Cee and Frank's relationship Frank is characterized as a protective and caring brother, but through Lily's portrayal of Frank the reader comes to see him as a "tilted man". When Lily first meets him "his eyes [have] such a quiet, faraway look- like people who made their living staring at ocean waves" (74). For Frank their relationship is his escape from trauma. Lily is his medicine that "displace[s] his disorder, his rage and his shame" (108). In

the relationship with Lily, she is the caregiver, and Frank becomes a disturbed man, without any “goals at all in life” (76). Through the focalisation of Lily the reader come to understand how sick Frank really is.

Frank’s differing positions in his relationships with the two women make the reader realize how much his traumas have changed him, but it also shows the unstable complexity of his personality. As Ibarrola points out, the reader “feel[s] bewildered at different points of the novel because the presence of multiple focalizers and two distinct narrating voices has this effect of forcing the reader to seek new modes of referentiality, usually more indirect and associative” (Ibarrola 116). Through the different portrayals of Frank, the reader must choose her own truth about him. Laura Castor also argues that within this dilemma, Morrison raises the reader’s awareness about the subjectivity of truth, in that “[t]ruth is multiple and no one narrator or reader holds all its expression” (Castor 143). By differentiating one characterization of Frank from another, Morrison gives the reader the impossible task of “creating” her own version of Frank. Also, due to his lack of insight in how his condition affects other characters, the reader will emotionally position herself above him.

Within Frank’s constant accusations of the narrator’s inability to imagine, his own lack of self-knowledge is also portrayed through his inability to imagine other characters’ perspectives on him. We see this through Frank and Lily’s different portrayals of their relationship. Through Frank’s own lack of empathy for Lily’s situation we understand that he actually cannot imagine how difficult it is for Lily, living with a “tilted man” (Morrison *Home* 80). His most affective phrase, “[y]ou can’t imagine it because you weren’t there,” mirrors Frank’s own inability to see how much he struggles with his past (93). But also the inability to imagine how his condition affects Lily, stating that he is “wide open for her... she had no competition in [his] mind except for the horses, a man’s foot, and Ycidra tembling under [his] arm” (69). His portrayal again appears ironic to the reader, because Frank does not understand

how the trauma these images present stands in the way of Lily's empathy for Frank. For Lily this has become a big wall between them (80). Through the dual perspectives on their relationship we see that "Frank's worldview cannot hold the perspective that Lily has" (Castor 145). Because of his traumatic history, he cannot imagine how his mental state burdens Lily and her plans for the future, because he simply is not mentally present.

4.2 Narrative distancing

The two narrators' mental distance from each other is also portrayed through the structure of the novel. First of all, there is a clear physical division of narrative space between the narrators, and the two narrative voices narrating in different fonts separate them completely. Through this physical distance, Morrison also portrays the isolation and repression of Frank's trauma. Furthermore, this structural division problematizes the ability for the reader to make character-Frank and narrator-Frank come together as one. In addition to the distance of narrative voices in the novel, the other characters' distance from Frank also impact reader's empathy. This resembles in some ways the distancing that happen to Sethe in *Beloved*. By isolating Frank, Morrison makes him unreachable for the reader as well.

Through Lily, Morrison portrays the exhaustive effect sympathy can have, eventually causing personal distress. Although Lily tries to empathize with Frank, to comfort him and help him move on, she cannot help much with his healing. Lily feels that from the very beginning "they slid into each other" and their life together was "glorious" (Morrison *Home* 75). However, this situation changes after a few months. After Frank has left their home, "the loneliness [Lily] felt before Frank walked her home from Wang's cleaners began to dissolve and in its place a shiver of freedom, or earned solitude, of choosing the wall she wanted to break through, minus the burden of shouldering a tilted man" (80). For Lily, the burden of

Frank's suppressed trauma becomes suffocating, and she finds emotional relief in her ability to distance herself from him when he leaves to rescue Cee.

Like Baby Suggs in relation to Sethe, Lily cannot fully come to terms with Frank's behaviour. Even though Lily is the "only woman [Frank has] ever loved, the only one who quells his nightmares" (Charles), she cannot truly empathize with him. She cannot condemn him, because she knows that the severity of his trauma makes him act the way he does, but neither can she approve of his behaviour, because she cannot imagine his motivations.

Although she has tried, Frank's traumas become overbearing for her sympathy. Through this dilemma, Morrison leaves her, as she leaves Baby Suggs, unable to take a stand, resulting in a turning away from Frank's suffering as a relief for her personal distress.

Lily's emotions for Frank can be seen as a model for the implied reader's emotions toward him. Lily feels "a sympathetic responsiveness to [Frank's] needs, and understands the way circumstances shape those needs, while respecting separateness and privacy" (Nussbaum 90). Similar to the reader, Lily understands that Frank's behaviour is caused by the war. She shows compassion in the way she accepts his behaviour, by acknowledging that "the war still haunted him, so whether annoyed or alarmed, she forgave him much" (Morrison *Home* 76). Both the reader and Lily make an effort to understand Frank's behaviour, but must acknowledge the limits of empathy in that they do not have similar experience to relate to. Lily shows that she also respects Frank's privacy by thinking that it is "better to move on" and does not confront Frank with his traumas from war (77). With this sympathetic attitude towards Frank, Lily manages to ease Frank's traumas some, even though she might be unaware of it herself. However, in her inability to relate she cannot help Frank as much in his recovery as Cee eventually can.

Cee's individual trauma distances her from Frank as part of her emotional healing process. When Frank is "blocked out visiting" her in the sickroom, Cee learns to face her

traumas on her own (119). From being very dependent on her big brother, she eventually grows into an independent woman, with help from the female community in Lotus. At the very end Cee claims that “she didn’t need [Frank] as she had before...she neither missed nor wanted his fingers at the nape of her neck telling her not to cry, that everything would be alright” (131), which indicates that Frank’s hand on her head cannot fully bring comfort to her fears anymore, because he cannot imagine the pains from the experiments, or the emotional burden of being deprived the chance of motherhood. As Castor points out, “Cee learns to heal herself as a woman in a space apart from any man, including her brother” and “Frank and Cee... find home together and separately” (Castor 148).

From the beginning of the novel Cee cannot truly empathize with Frank, not even with his traumas from childhood. This because, as I have illustrated earlier, Frank has always been in charge of her. Therefore, Cee "idolizes" him. The reader also gets this confirmed by Lenore’s statement that "the four-year-old brother was clearly the real mother to the infant" (Morrison *Home* 88). Therefore, I believe that Cee's extreme "admiration" for Frank in the beginning, "is likely to lead [her] to imagine [Frank's] sorrow or fear as less than it really is" (Hogan *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion* 279). As Cee and Frank part after he “claims” her back from the cruel doctor and Cee distances herself from him, her admiration for Frank changes into a relationship of equality (Morrison *Home* 118). This further increases her ability to empathize with him. Because of their established equality in the end of the novel, we see that by facing up to her traumas, Cee inspires Frank to do the same with her support.

Cee's change in relation to Frank resembles in some ways Frank’s journey of becoming equal to the reader. This he manages by finally coming to terms with what he has done, by “know[ing] the truth, accept[ing] it and keep[ing] on...” (132). The reader no longer views Frank from a perspective “above” him, because of this “awakening”. She now

sees him positioned emotionally equal to the reader. This partially makes her able to understand Frank, like Paul D tries to find a way to come to terms with Sethe, by being her equal and placing his story next to hers.

Throughout the novel the reader also sees how the narrator helps Frank come to terms with his traumatic memories. The fact that the narrator is “willing to bear witness and to assist in the recovery of those memories is crucial for [Frank’s] reconstruction of a sense of self” (Ibarrola 117). Furthermore, Ibarrola points out that in Frank’s doubt of the narrator’s ability to be a “true sharer,” he may “underestimate the scribe’s powers to find a language more adequate to transcribe his psychic wounds” than Frank can (117). It is possible that it is only in this presence of the narrator, that Frank can come to terms with his traumas. By narrating small hints of what “[Frank] truly [cannot] remember” throughout the novel (Morrison *Home* 15), Morrison prepares him for releasing his burden. This also helps Frank’s first-person narration to come closer to the third-person narration. Finally, with guidance from Cee and help from the narrator, Frank is able to confess, as much to himself as to anyone else, saying, “I lied to you and I lied to me” (133). This slow preparation in the third-person narration is also emotionally preparing the reader for the confession that will come.

In Frank’s own first portrayal of the murder of the scavenging girl in Korea he narrates the killer as someone else:

She smiles, reaches for the soldier’s crotch, touches it. It surprises him. Yum-Yum? As soon as I look away from her hand to her face, see the two missing teeth, the fall of black hair above eager eyes, he blows her away. Only the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange. Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is why he had to kill. Yum-yum. (95 underlined by me)

This makes Frank a witness, portraying the “vision” partially from a third-person point of view since he narrates internal emotions within the guard, “*It surprises him*”. Frank’s ability to empathize and reason with “the guard’s” actions and motivations, together with the constant repetitions of the scavenging girl’s presence throughout the narrative, implies for the reader that Frank is closer to the action than what he admits to himself. When he places the guilt on the relief guard, he manages to describe the event in detail. By imagining the story with someone else as the agent, Frank is able to narrate an emotional picture of this poor little girl.

When Frank finally comes forward with his confession, it is direct with no detailed descriptions. Frank has to get it out there, finally able to admit, and to understand his crime. This way, Morrison reduces the distance between the reader and Frank as well. Even though the crime in itself makes empathetic response impossible, Frank does get some sympathy from Morrison’s implied reader.

I shot the Korean girl in her face.

I am the one she touched.

I am the one who saw her smile...

I am the one she aroused...

A child. A wee little girl. (135)

For each sentence, little bits of Frank’s burden are slowly lifted off from his shoulders. The repeating “*I*” seems to sink into Frank’s mind as he speaks, and finally allows him to be able to see his own self-denial and ignorance, “*I didn’t think. I didn’t have to. Better she should die. How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn’t know was in me?*” (135). This moment of clarity for Frank helps him partially recover.

Morrison helps Frank come a long way in the process of healing, not only by guiding him to remember, but also by letting him face the crime in his own narrative voice. Within this dialogue Frank finally comes to terms with the crime. He can stand up like a man, “[h]urt down right in the middle. But alive and well” (147). And this, as I have mentioned, equalizes his perspective to the reader’s. That is also evident in the final chapter and Cee and Frank’s reburial of the Black man, which Ibarrola argues, in “itself is a symbol for uncovering memories.” Though this ritual they “finally come to face their childhood trauma, and the reader feels that they are now progressing toward maturity and responsibility” (Ibarrola 121). When Frank realizes his own condition, the uneven relation between sufferer and empathizer that Adam Smith refers to is levelled out, and the reader can feel for Frank based on his emotions as he now has become aware of them.

In *Home*, Morrison challenges reader’s empathy through Frank’s lack of knowledge of what he has done and his ignorance of his mental condition. Since Frank is in a mental state where he cannot recognize his own feelings and motivations, the reader’s emotion towards him will most likely be of pity from the position of one who knows more than he does. When Frank finally comes to terms with the murder and burial, it closes this distance between reader and protagonist, and the reader can partially sympathize with Frank, but the severity of the murder itself still limits the reader’s ability to empathize with him.

5. Teaching *Beloved* and *Home* in upper secondary school

In this part of the thesis I discuss some ideas on how narrative empathy and Toni Morrison's works could be taught in upper secondary schools in Norway, in the programme subject "English Language and Literature." I will further suggest that attentiveness to how perspectives can manipulate reader's empathy might help the students become more reflective people. First, I will focus on how to approach *Beloved* inside of the classroom. I will include a discussion of the academic difficulty of *Beloved* and suggest how the work can be used in accordance with the Knowledge Promotion Reform and the English Subject Curriculum. I will focus mainly on *Beloved* but also include thoughts on how to choose between *Beloved* and *Home*. The individual teacher should evaluate aspects of time, students' level of competence, and look at the opportunity of adapted education and differentiation when deciding on the most suitable way to approach the work(s) together with their class. I will end my discussion by reflecting upon how knowledge of narrative empathy could affect the students' social development. I believe that the manipulative techniques we explore through *Beloved*, in many ways are similar to manipulations of emotional responses in real life such as in portrayals of current events (national and international).

5.1 *Beloved* and *Home* in the classroom

One of the most important aims of foreign language education is to give the students the opportunity to explore cultures and identities different from themselves. Through English literature they have a unique chance to "travel without traveling." This way the students learn to reflect upon cultures and identities different than their own (Vestli 5). As the objectives of the subject curriculum states, English Literature "can be a wellspring of experience, satisfaction and personal growth. The programme subject's broad approach to culture and society in the English-speaking world shall develop one's skills in critical analysis and

reflection” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training). English literature familiarizes students with a wide diversity of characters that differ from the students themselves, due to their cultural and moral backgrounds. Therefore, English literature can challenge students’ empathy and initial perspectives.

In *Encounters with Literature*, Elisabeth Ibsen and Signe Mari Wiland acknowledge the importance of the interaction between the reader and the text, and propose a reader response approach to literature. Wolfgang Iser, like Bakhtin, values the participation of the reader as significant to the realisation of the text (Ibsen and Wiland 142). With this dialectical approach, the teacher’s focus will be on the students’ own interpretations, and “the student’s understanding of the text is based on past experiences and knowledge about literature and life” (Ibsen and Wiland 145). This gives both freedom and accountability to the students as readers. When working with narrative perspectives the students should also interact with each other. This can make the students more attentive to how narrative perspective may affect a fellow student differently. Through dialogues and cooperative learning, the student practices his or her ability to view an event from another student’s perspective. By cooperation in groups, the ability to imagine other students’ point of views can increase as well (Aakervik et al. 41).

5.1.1 Students’ level of competence

“English Literature and Culture” is a programme subject, which means that the students most often have made the choice to attend the course themselves. Therefore, I would assume that at least some of the students have personal interests in the subject. Norwegian students’ average level in speaking and understanding English in general increases every year because they not only process it through the text-books in school, but are also widely exposed to English in their leisure time activities such as online games, movies, series, internet and music (Ibsen 50-51). At this level of education, one can therefore assume that the students

hold a relatively high level of competence in reading and understanding English. However, to be able to say anything certain about the student's competence, a teacher must know her students well.

It is important for a teacher to be familiar with the students' personal backgrounds as well as their academic level, because only through this whole picture of the students, will the teacher be able to challenge them both individually and collectively (Lyngsnes and Rismark 81). It is therefore important that the teacher has established good personal relations with the students and the students among each other. This also allows the students to feel safe in their learning environment because a good learning environment increases the quality reflective class discussions (Eilertsen 18).

In addition to the academic level and backgrounds of the students, the teacher should consider their level of maturity. In *Beloved*, Morrison explores themes like sexuality, murder, rape and abuse in quite disturbing scenes, and the work also contains harsh vocabulary. The two American teachers Renè Matthews and Robin Chandler were concerned about their students' maturity when they first assigned *Beloved* to juniors in American high school. However, they concluded that the students "are not only mature enough, but that they are also hungry for texts that challenge them to grow and think" (Matthews 91). These students had two important advantages to the work compared to what Norwegian students have; they are native speakers, and they live in Kentucky. Therefore, Matthews and Chandler's students probably have a more personal relationship to the history of slavery, and also as native speakers they have an advantage in comprehension. Approaching the work in Norway would therefore require more input-work before reading, both because of the historical value of *Beloved*, and also due to the complex structure of it. However, I believe that a teacher in Norway can devote a decent amount of time to the novel with good conscience because there

are several competence aims that can be covered through variations of methods of approaching the work.

5.1.2 Competence aims from the English subject curriculum

When studying *Beloved*, with focus on narrative empathy, the students will practice the ability to “summarize, comment on and discuss differing viewpoints in fictional texts” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training). For instance, the teacher can have the students compare Stamp Paid’s perspective on the infanticide with Sethe’s. Before working with these differing viewpoints the students must have integrated “...the [basic] terminology needed for analysing works of fiction” in their vocabulary through input exercises. This includes being able to recognize and define narrative terms like third- and first-person narrator, character, characterization, plot and protagonist. It can also expand into more specific terms describing the narrative situation such as stream of consciousness or narrated monologue depending on student’s individual level of competence. Which terms need to be introduced to the students before working with *Beloved* also depends on the students’ familiarity with literary terminology from previous courses of English or Norwegian. Furthermore, the students will practice the ability to “interpret literary texts... from a cultural-historical and social perspective”. All students of the programme are also supposed to interpret two longer works of fiction during the course, which they could do as post-reading work after working with the novel. In addition to these competence aims, the students will work on basic skills, (for instance, reading and expressing themselves orally) in the process.

5.1.3 Home in the classroom

Whereas *Beloved* could be too complicated a work for many students, *Home* is written through less challenging language and structure. The content is complex, but manageable. In terms of vocabulary and narrative techniques *Home* can be interpreted and read by most

students in the programme. Therefore, I find it a good alternative for differentiation. The physical length of the work could be an important factor when it comes to motivation for reading, especially for students who have difficulties with finishing longer works. The class could also be divided into two groups where one group reads *Beloved* and the other reads *Home*, or the students could choose between works themselves. If the majority then decides to read *Home*, the teacher can encourage students who want to be challenged, to read *Beloved* instead. Also giving the students themselves the opportunity to choose between works can be a good way to engage the students in their own learning process. Again, the maturity of students in the class must determine which way to approach the works.

5.1.4 Methods of approaching multiple perspective as a theme in the novels

Using a reader response approach to the novels can be a motivational factor for the students because the purpose of reading will mainly not be to analyse the work itself, but also to discuss how Morrison's complex narrative strategies affect their own emotional responses as readers. Their interpretations are, first, dependent only on their own level of competence, and further on the dialogues with the teacher and fellow students. As Elisabeth Ibsen points out,

Meeting a literary text in the right way will give the reader an emotional and personal experience, as well as give room for reflection; the reader can discover important things about himself or herself through the text. This emotional appeal will involve the students in a learning process.

(Ibsen and Wiland 144)

Matthews and Chandler discovered that they were successful in engaging the students in the learning process when they taught *Beloved* by using a reader response approach to the novel.

In her response to the work one of their students wrote, “[t]he book made us think from different points and it brought out a lot [of] emotions because everybody reacted differently to certain incidents in the book” (Matthews 91). Since *Beloved* both provokes and prevents empathetic feelings in students, it can be effective in creating a good learning environment, where the students practice openness to each other’s perspectives on the text, as well as to the text itself.

Input, identification and internalization

Studying either one of the novels will require some basic knowledge about the history of slavery and racial discrimination in America. If this is a theme the students are unfamiliar with, they should spend some time researching the topics as input, or pre-reading activities. The input stage “is the period of conscious preparation for the more creative work to come” for the students (Ibsen and Wiland 147).

Example 1: *Beloved*: A project across the subjects of English and History

One of the competence aims of History as a common core subject is to “examine how [their] own ideas about the past have been shaped and [to] discuss the factors that cause people to have different perceptions about the past” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training). With an integrated approach, the students can do group-research on the true story of Margaret Garner and the newspaper article that portrays her crime, as input-work. In relation to *Home* they can investigate how historical perspectives portray the 1950’s in America, to make themselves a mental picture of life in America at the time. This historical research the students can do as small group project.

As the students work with the novels, they can compare how the novel and historical approaches invoke different feelings within them, and also how each portrays different perspectives on the period of time. Also in work with *Beloved* students can debate which story

they respond most emotionally to, the infamous Margaret Garner or the character Sethe. Susan A Jolley, teacher in American high school writes, “before reading *Beloved* the majority [of her students] expressed horror that a mother could kill her child, as the protagonist Sethe does” (Jolley 34). She found that her student became very interested in the real story of Margaret Garner after reading the work, and they began an extensive project on her, and some students even ended up writing their in-depth papers on this. The combination of fiction and history became very important for the students and their emotional responses to the project. Jolley’s students even expressed that they felt like “they learned truths and lessons that had eluded them in years past” (35). One of the basic skills in the English curriculum is that the ability to read English “involves understanding, exploring and pondering demanding texts, thereby gaining insight across cultures and special fields” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training). Both *Beloved* and *Home* are novels that can be used to enable the student in doing this.

Example 2: Sethe’s trial

As additional input to *Beloved* one can also use extracts from the work, portraying different perspectives of the infanticide and let the students compare these in groups. By giving them an introduction to the difficult structure before they approach the work, the students might be more prepared for the work.

When the students have finished reading the novel, they can go into the stage of identification and improvisation (Ibsen and Wiland 148). The teacher can divide the students into groups; each group should try to imagine one perspective on the crime. One group can formulate Stamp Paid’s deposition, one the School Teacher’s, one Sethe’s defence and so on. The class can then simulate a trial, where each group presents their views to portray the

different perspectives on the crime, and try to convince to jury that their perspective is the right one. The teacher can then act as a judge in the trial.

Example 3: Comparative study of *Beloved* and the movie adaptation

The students can also approach the themes of perspective and empathy, by watching some clips from the scene where Sethe kills her child. This can be done either prior to or after reading *Beloved*. The students can then compare Sethe as a character in the novel with Sethe in the movie. This way the students will be able to discuss how a movie might affect viewers differently than a novel affects readers. Further, they can reflect upon the extent to which the movie manages to portray individual perspectives, in comparison to the novel. Do we get multiple perspectives in the movie?

Suggestions on further “class work” with focus on perspectives and empathy

After working on the novels’ ability to manipulate empathy, the students might be more attentive to national and international media’s techniques of manipulating human empathy. Therefore, I suggest engaging the students in a project where they analyse and compare articles made by different news agencies. These can be perspectives of political contradictions, racial conflicts or international warfare and so on. The teacher may first ask some input questions to encourage students’ reflections: Whom do we empathize with, what do we “block” out, and whom do we pity? Why do we react the way we do? Is this reaction manipulated by the way the news is presented or portrayed? One may first let them dwell upon these questions together, and then engage the students in group-discussions where they compare their individual views.

Discussing these perspectives might also be a good way to practise “giv[ing] an account of and evaluat[ing] the use of sources” (Utdanningsdirektoratet). The teacher can let

the students do this by searching for information on specific topics on the Internet, to find websites that give different portrayals of the same topics. Furthermore, they can investigate how the fundamental beliefs of a certain site impacts the perspective it gives on a topic.

5.2 Narrative empathy and social skills development

I suggest that reading works that challenge reader's empathy could enhance students' development of reflective awareness of real life perspectives. The introduction to the core curriculum states that "[t]he aim of education is to expand the individual's capacity to perceive and to participate, to experience, to empathize and to excel" (The Norwegian Board of Education 5). Working with *Beloved* and *Home* inside the classroom in this way, could affect students' life outside of the classroom as well, because the works may expand the student's ability to see manipulation of perspectives in real life. The overall aim of teaching *Beloved* and *Home* is also for students to become aware of the different perspectives around them, in interaction with other students, and elsewhere in society.

There is an important gradual change in how teachers portray students from primary, to secondary, to upper secondary school. As the students mature they are treated more and more like independent adults, through a larger focus on independent learning responsibilities. Therefore, it can be challenging for the teacher to be much involved in the process of social development for students. I think that an integrated platform of academic subject and social development is good for the students also in upper secondary school, where teachers find ways to incorporate this social aspect in their subject, since it often is only within the subject that the teacher interacts with the students. To find the connection between subject and students' social life, and make the students aware of this connection could perhaps be motivational for the student's effort in the subject itself as well.

By rehearsing the ability to imagine, and reflect upon what it is like to be in another person's place, the student might become more attentive to the subjectivity of all perceptions, including their own. To be able to recognize what one cannot empathize with is also a developmental skill that can enlarge the student's ability to acknowledge that what a fellow student brings with him or her as baggage, will affect how he or she act and respond in relation to other students. Even though the students most likely fail to identify with the protagonists Sethe and Frank Money, this failure is also a source of understanding the characters. As Martha Nussbaum points out, "by both identification and its absence we learn what life has done to people" (92). Their traumatic memories, especially Frank's may resemble many of the memories refugees from war experiences. The students are encouraged to reflect upon why they do not understand, and through that reflection become more aware of the reasons why people act the way they do.

Social issues like bullying and gossip are sadly not vanishing on the way up the levels of the school system. Therefore, it is important that teachers' responsibilities concerning their students' social development do not decrease, but rather change in their contextual form and become more complex. By focusing on manipulations of different perspectives in literature, the students will also practice respecting difference, and not turning away from it. How many times do we not hear someone say, "We are too different, so we cannot work together"? Following Vygotsky, working with someone with different knowledge than him- or herself can most likely teach a student more because the difference in their knowledge and perspective will help the student expand his or her knowledge and perspective. In the same way a character one fails to easily identify with can help encourage the curiosity of why ones fails to do this.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated how Toni Morrison uses multiple perspectives to complicate reader's empathy in her two novels *Beloved* and *Home*. It shows that in *Beloved*, Morrison does this first of all by repeating the event of Sethe killing her child through several different focalizers. These perspectives all portray differing emotional states towards Sethe – resentment, pity, aversion, sympathy, indifference – which further causes the emotional state of the reader to change throughout the novel. Through this subjective structure, Morrison demonstrates how each new perspective affects our emotions toward the character or the event problematized. By making her reader aware of this, she points out that truth itself is multiple. In *Home*, Morrison problematizes empathy through Frank's inability to remember, or not allowing himself to remember that he killed the scavenging girl in Korea and the burial he witnessed as a child. By using two distinct narrative voices, Morrison places the reader's knowledge above Frank's, which limits empathy because the reader cannot share Frank's feelings when Frank does not recognize them himself.

At the very end of these novels we see a circularity in *Beloved* in that Sethe never comes to terms with her crime, where every attempt the reader makes to come closer to her fails. In *Home* the reader experiences progress, in that Frank comes to terms with the truth of his traumas. In comparison, we cannot sympathize with Sethe because we are unfamiliar with her truth, since she has not come to terms with her trauma. With Frank however, who with guidance from the narrator and Cee finally is able to do this, we can feel sympathy. We therefore see that some of the issues that block empathy from the reader in *Beloved* are more resolved in *Home*, the structure of which makes the different perspectives more comprehensible for the reader. In the end, the severity of the traumas that these characters both are victims and agents of distances the reader from them, and by that make us aware of our limitations as empathizers.

To return to the quote in the very beginning of this thesis, Morrison, as Nussbaum, believes that authors, through literature, have the ability to shape the perception a person has of the world. We also see how Morrison forms her readers by challenging them to comprehend different perspectives, and difficult ethical dilemmas. She profoundly shapes her readers' awareness of these perspectives existence, and their equal right to be heard, felt and respected. Morrison further teaches her readers throughout her novels that truth as we "know" it changes as more perspectives are added to that knowledge.

Furthermore, I have proposed that studying how these narrative perspectives influence their "readerly" emotions towards characters, may be developmental for students in upper secondary school. Even though they cannot fully empathize with someone because that person is different from them, the students can acknowledge that there is a reason behind this person's actions, in which they are incapable of understanding. When we watch or read about victims of war, natural catastrophes or personal trauma, these events occur so distant from our situational mapping system that we cannot imagine being one of these victims. Therefore, our compassion often turns into pity, which again turns into indifference. Novels such as Morrison's can therefore bring awareness to how the perspectives we are introduced to manipulate our empathetic response.

To end this thesis as I began, I am still not as certain as Martha Nussbaum that novel readers become more compassionate than those who do not read. I do think however, that awareness of how narrative perspectives could be used to manipulate empathy broadens our ability to be aware of similar manipulations in real life, and become more reflective upon them.

7. Works cited

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