Høgskulen på Vestlandet

Engelsk 3, emne 4 - Masteroppgave

MGBEN550-O-2023-VÅR2-FLOWassign

Predefinert informasjon

Startdato:	02-05-2023 09:00 CEST	**Termin:**	2023 VÅR2
Sluttdato:	15-05-2023 14:00 CEST	**Vurderingsform:**	Norsk 6-trinns skala (A-F)
Eksamensform:	Masteroppgave		
Flowkode:	203 MGBEN550 1 O 2023 VÅR2		
Intern sensor:	(Anonymisert)		

Deltaker

Kandidatnr.:	204

Informasjon fra deltaker

Antall ord *:	30384

Egenerklæring *: Ja

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Developing empathy through fantasy literature

A comparative analysis of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*

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MGBEN550 – Master's Thesis
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15.05.23

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate possible connections between fantasy literature and the development and fostering of empathy. At the same time, I explore how this may contribute to promoting the ideas, values, and aims represented in the Norwegian national curriculum (LK20). After a brief introduction to empathetic systems and their development, I draw connections between literature, empathy, and ethics. In my analysis, I investigate how the narrative elements of plot, characters, and point of view may relate to empathy in two fantasy novels. The thesis provides a comparative close reading of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief.* The findings show that the narrative elements foster empathy through factors such as identification with characters or events, bonding with the narrative and its characters, the suspension of disbelief, and fantastic events making a safe place for children to experience and explore their own and others' emotions. These factors may contribute to aims of the Norwegian national curriculum related to developing an identity, social and intercultural competence, critical thinking, and compassion for others, as well as creativity and imagination. As shown through the discussion of the novels and the national curriculum, there is strong potential in using fantasy literature for developing important aspects of children's social and psychological systems.

Sammendrag

Hensikten med denne masteroppgaven er å undersøke mulige sammenhenger mellom fantastisk litteratur og utviklingen og fostringen av empati. Samtidig utforsker jeg hvordan dette kan bidra til å fremme ideer, verdier og mål som er representert i den norske læreplanen (LK20). Etter en kort introduksjon til empatiske systemer og deres utvikling trekker jeg sammenhenger mellom litteratur, empati og etikk. I analysen utforsker jeg hvordan de narrative elementene handling, karakterer og synsvinkel kan relatere til empati i to fantastiske romaner. Masteroppgaven gir en komparativ nærlesing av *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* og *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief.* Funnene viser at de narrative elementene fremmer empati gjennom faktorer som identifikasjon med karakterer eller hendelser, et bånd til fortellingen og karakterene, suspensjon av vantro og fantastiske hendelser som skaper et trygt sted for barn å oppleve og utforske sine egne og andres følelser. Disse faktorene kan bidra til mål i den norske læreplanen relatert til identitet, sosial og interkulturell kompetanse, kritisk tenkning og medfølelse for andre, samt kreativitet og fantasi. Som vist gjennom diskusjonen av romanene og den norske læreplanen er det et stort potensial i bruken av fantastisk litteratur til å utvikle viktige aspekter av barns sosiale og psykologiske systemer.

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1   Introduction

> To me, empathy is the spark of human concern for others,
> the glue that makes social life possible.
> (Hoffman, 2000, p. 3)

1.1 Background and relevance

The concept of empathy and its relation to social and moral development has been discussed and debated by philosophers and psychologists for hundreds of years (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 3). At the same time, investigations on how narratives are fundamentally social in nature, and how understanding stories entails understanding people, have been conducted (Mar et al., 2006, p. 696). As the ability to understand and feel for others mostly develops during childhood, it is then not far-fetched to assume that children's literature can be a component in developing and fostering empathy. How may this then be introduced into our educational system?

Throughout the years, several studies have investigated the connection between fictional literature and the development of empathy. For instance, in 2006 Raymond A. Mar, Keith Oatley, Jacob Hirsh, Jennifer dela Paz, and Jordan B. Peterson conducted a study where they investigated the social abilities of readers of fiction versus non-fiction. Mar also, alongside Jennifer L. Tackett, and Chris Moore, explored in 2009 how exposure to storybooks, movies, and television can develop 'theory of mind' – to understand others as their own selves (American Psychological Association, n.d.d). In 2017, Lauren Learn and Melissa Cueto studied the level of empathy in children who read significantly more and less than each other. Recurring in all three studies is that readers of fiction tend to have better empathetic and social abilities than non-readers. However, there have not been many investigations about how fantasy literature specifically may support this process. One of the premises of this thesis is that the fantasy genre offers a uniquely safe space for young readers to negotiate their emotions and develop empathy. The research problem of this thesis is therefore connected to investigating the potentials of fantasy literature in developing and fostering empathy, while at the same time exploring how the genre's potential relations to empathy may contribute to the ideas, values, and aims represented in the Norwegian national curriculum.

As empathy, according to Nicole M. McDonald and Daniel S. Messinger (2011, p. 23), has an impact on social competence and the fostering of meaningful relationships, developing empathy is arguably an important factor in establishing a well-functioning society, as well as an important aid for individuals in their day-to-day life. Martin Hoffman (1984; 2000), an American psychologist and professor of clinical and developmental psychology, describes the natural development of empathy as taking place during childhood, right up to the beginning of primary education. This means that all children, when starting primary school, should have some empathy already developed. Consequently, the classroom can be an ideal place to explore and foster empathy, which may lead to positive outcomes in social interactions by understanding other persons and their perspectives, as well as showing that one cares by feeling with them in certain situations. Additionally, children may develop their identity if given the opportunity to explore their own and others' perspectives, values, and motivations. Empathy, as a result, can potentially have a positive impact on a child and their future.

Reading fictional literature presents the reader with situations and contexts that may mirror those one may meet in real life. Mar et al. (2006, pp. 695-696) hypothesise that real-world processing and narrative processing both connect to the same cognitive mechanisms related to empathy. This highlights the idea that fictional narratives are social in nature, as they often discuss relationships and events that elicit emotion. One branch of fictional literature, namely fantasy literature, allows young readers especially to immerse themselves into a new world where the impossible becomes possible. Fantastic stories can bring a reader on a journey to magic and monsters, while also inviting them to witness and experience real emotions. This way, according to Maria Nikolajeva (2006), children are presented with an opportunity to feel real emotions in a setting that is not overly intimidating or personal. Consequently, they can immerse themselves even more into the narrative and allow themselves to bond with and respond with empathy towards the characters and plot. This bonding, according to Suzanne Keen (2007, pp. ix-xiii), is involved in fostering empathy and prosocial actions. Through bonding with characters and the plot, often emphasised by the POV, the reader may feel a strong sense of identification, caring, and thereby empathy towards the narrative. I will discuss this further in chapter 2.

The Norwegian national curriculum (LK20) highlights literature and its benefits when presenting its aims for Norwegian pupils. The Norwegian government issued several aims for the Norwegian educational system that they claim would benefit their pupils, as well as society. These goals are grounded in values such as kindness, openness, inclusivity, and

compassion. Simultaneously, they request that Norwegian teachers should aid the pupils in their development of an identity, social and intercultural competence, and other knowledge and skills that may be beneficial and useful. Developing empathy is closely related to a person's identity, as well as aiding individuals in social situations by exploring and understanding different perspectives and emotions. Therefore, purposefully working towards fostering and developing empathy may be used to work towards these aims.

1.2 Data selection and collection

The data material I will use for this MA thesis consists of two children's fantasy novels: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J. K. Rowling, published in 1997 by Bloomsbury Publishing, and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, published by Hyperion Books for Children in 2005. These books fall under the category of fantasy literature as they both have magical and unrealistic elements to them. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* includes a series of magical elements such as wizardry, trolls, dragons, and potions. The *Harry Potter* series, later adapted into films, have had, and continues to have, a huge influence on children and young adults. The series has gained popularity all over the world and has been translated into 80 different languages (Wradmin, 2021). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is the first of the series, and thereby serves as an introduction to the world of witchcraft and wizardry which Harry and the readers explore and journey through (Alva, 2021). The series is the best-selling fantasy book series of all time, and the first book is the most sold of the seven (Wradmin, 2021). This makes *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* a relevant novel, even 26 years after its publishing. Similarly, Riordan's novel includes fantastic elements such as hellhounds, flying shoes, and magical powers. The *Percy Jackson* series has been sold over 180 million times worldwide (Curcic, 2021), which makes the series a fantasy story that many people and children seem to resonate with. The first novel of the instalment, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, introduces the readers to the world of Greek mythology, as well as the characters and the magical elements that affect them. The first two novels of the series have been adapted into popular films. These films make the story of Percy's adventure even more accessible.

However magical and unrealistic these novels are in terms of plot, they describe and present realistic emotional stories about loyalty, sadness, bravery, and friendship, as well as other realistic situations and emotions. They additionally give the reader opportunities to experience someone else's perspective and view of the world. By choosing novels from the same genre, one may compare narrative elements and explore how they may contribute to fostering empathy.

1.3 Research questions

In this thesis, I investigate the potential connections between empathy, fantasy literature, and education. The thesis will therefore be guided by the following overarching question:

What are the potentials of fantasy literature in the fostering of empathy?

In order to investigate this, I have formulated two research questions that will guide my research:

a. How do the narrative elements of plot, characters, and POV contribute to fostering empathy in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*?
b. How may developing empathy through fantasy literature contribute to the aims of the Norwegian national curriculum?

These research questions will aid my exploration of the connections between empathy, children's fantasy literature, and the Norwegian national curriculum.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into five chapters. Included at the beginning is an abstract in both English and Norwegian, as well as a table of contents. A list of references is included at the

end of the thesis, structured into the primary and secondary references that were used in the investigation.

The first chapter is the introduction to the thesis. The first section presented the background and relevance of the study, demonstrating the connections between the three key concepts of the thesis: empathy, fantasy literature, and the Norwegian national curriculum. The second and following sections introduced the two primary texts and presented the research questions that will guide the thesis. The remaining section of this chapter will introduce the novels to the readers.

The second chapter will present the theoretical considerations and key concepts of the thesis. The first section of this chapter focuses on the concept and development of empathy, as well as empathy's relation to literature. This is important in understanding how empathy works and is developed and fostered. At the same time, it foreshadows the connections that will be made to fantasy literature and LK20. Following this, the ethics of reading literature, and the values and aims of the Norwegian national curriculum are presented. Further, I present theory about fantasy literature, the literary analysis method that is used in this thesis, and the narrative elements of plot, characters, and POV which will be investigated in the analysis. The theories presented here may be intertwined as the development and fostering of empathy can be connected to the narrative elements of fantasy literature, while also deemed important in LK20. The last section of the chapter will present some ethical considerations within the thesis.

The third chapter is the analysis of the two fantasy books that are used to investigate the research problem: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*. The analysis will focus on the narrative elements of plot, characters, and POV in each book, and how these may contribute to foster empathy. These elements contain factors that contribute to developing and fostering empathy that go beyond the natural psychological development, as well as characteristics of fantasy that allow for empathy.

Chapter four discusses the analysis in relation to the theory presented in the second chapter and connects this to the research questions. The first section investigates the first research question, which compares the narrative elements in each novel and their contribution to fostering empathy. The second section discusses the Norwegian national curriculum and how the findings of the previous section may contribute to children's education.

The final chapter presents a summary of the study's main ideas, as well as closing comments related to the topic and research. Further, the chapter discusses how this thesis can enhance Norwegian education and introduce some ideas on how the topic of empathy development through literature can be explored further.

1.5 Synopsis of the novels

1.5.1   *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone tells the story of Harry Potter, a boy whose parents were killed by the evil and dangerous Lord Voldemort when he was a baby. He tried to kill Harry too but failed. This resulted in Voldemort weakening and disappearing. Harry was the first person to ever withstand a killing curse, making him famous among witches and wizards. As a result, Dumbledore, the headmaster at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, decided the safest place for him would be to live with his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, along with their son Dudley. Throughout his childhood, though, Harry is treated badly by the Dursleys based on their dislike for Harry's parents and their magical abilities. However, Harry is oblivious to both himself and his parents being wizards. Coming up on Harry's eleventh birthday, Harry receives a letter inviting him to enrol at Hogwarts. At school, he befriends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, as well as Hagrid, the gamekeeper. Together they learn and practice magic, which becomes useful as they figure out that Voldemort is planning to return, stronger than before, with the help of the Philosopher's Stone. The three of them, believing their Potions professor, Severus Snape, is aiding Voldemort, try to stop them both. This journey involves fighting trolls, chess skills, herbology, broomsticks, a magical mirror, and lots of books. In the end, Harry comes face to face with Voldemort, who is occupying the back of his Defence Against the Dark Arts professor, Quirrell's, head. This means that Professor Snape was innocent. Harry beats Voldemort and Quirrell with the help of his friends, their skills, and his mother's love which lives within him. The novel ends with Harry's Hogwarts house, Gryffindor, winning the House Cup, and him and his friends heading back to London for the summer.

Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief follows Percy (Perseus) Jackson on his journey after finding out his father is a Greek god. Throughout his life, Percy has been defined as troubled and has been expelled from various schools. Many blame his ADHD and frustrations from dyslexia for his behaviour. However, he is often misunderstood and does not mean to cause trouble. On a class trip, his teacher turns into a monster that Percy later recognises as a Fury. This is a turning point for him and his life as he knows it. The event leads to Percy having to flee his hometown of New York and stay at Camp Half-Blood, along with other demigods. At the camp, Percy finds out that his father, who has been absent his whole life, is the sea-god Poseidon. His father has been accused of stealing Zeus' powerful lightning bolt, which causes an argument between the two brothers. Zeus believes Percy has helped his father in this task, resulting in Percy having to go on a quest to retrieve the bolt to prove his and his father's innocence, and ultimately preventing a war. On his quest, along with his friends Grover and Annabeth, he stumbles upon monsters and gods. Despite this, they are successful in their mission in the end. However, Percy finds out his camp friend, Luke, is the one who stole the lightning bolt in the first place, which leaves him with many questions. In conclusion, the novel brings the reader on a journey of suspense, action, emotions, and drama, and invites the reader into a new world of magic.

2 Theoretical considerations

This chapter presents theory about the key concepts of the thesis. The first section focuses on empathy, its systems, and its development. The second section touches upon the ethics of reading literature, while the third section introduces the Norwegian national curriculum and its values. The fourth section presents fantasy literature. These sections are used in connecting empathy to fantasy literature and the narrative elements, as well as relating these findings to LK20. Following, the fifth and sixth sections present the literary analysis method I will use in the analysis of the two novels, and the narrative elements that will be analysed. The last section touches upon ethical considerations within the thesis.

2.1 Empathy

This section will look at the concept of empathy and the stages of empathy development. As this thesis builds on the idea that reading fantasy literature may foster empathy, it is important to be aware of its characteristics, systems, and developments. Consequently, this knowledge may strengthen the claim as it shows some factors that may be connected to fantasy literature and the Norwegian national curriculum. Firstly, reading literature may elicit emotions in the reader. These emotions may be more suited to the characters' situations and emotions. Thereby, reading literature may foster what is called 'affective empathy' (feeling what others feel). At the same time, the reader may take, see, or understand one of the characters' perspectives, which can be connected to 'cognitive empathy' (understanding what others feel). Secondly, the characteristics and systems within the psychological development of empathy contribute to the development of both affective and cognitive empathy. Both are important aspects of empathy development and are present when reading literature. Furthermore, the development shows that the psychological level of empathy is already present during Norwegian primary school for typically developing children as the last stage of development happens as a young child. Teachers can therefore use literature to maximise the potentials of LK20 and foster empathy in this way from an early age. Thirdly, by looking at the characteristics and systems of empathy one gains a better understanding of which narrative elements promote empathy and how these elements may be related to certain factors

such as identification, situational empathy, bonding, emotional contagion, and more, all of which Keen (2007) discusses. Keen links all these factors to literature, thereby strengthening the idea that certain narrative elements may contribute to fostering and developing empathy. I will explore this further in the last section about empathy.

2.1.1 *Defining empathy*

Empathy is a complex and much-discussed concept that points to both a psychological and an emotional process (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1990, p. 3). This makes for many different formulations and definitions that focus on different aspects of the concept. Norma Deitch Feshback (1975) describes empathy as "an affective process in which a person is able to 'share an emotional response with another as well as the ability to discriminate the other's perspective and role'" (as cited in Cress & Holm, 1998, p. 4). Martin Hoffman defined in 1984 empathy as "an affective response more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own" (as cited in Cress & Holm, 1998, p. 4). Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer (1987) state that empathy is "an emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition and is congruent with the other's emotional state or situation" (p. 5). All these definitions point to empathy being a process between oneself and another and is made visible by a response to this other person.

In his book about empathy and moral development, Hoffman (2000, p. 30) discusses the complexity of empathy. He states that the more he studies empathy, the more complex it becomes. Therefore, he finds that defining empathy in terms of the underlying processes, rather than the outcome, is more effective. He has therefore added to his previous definition that the key requirement to empathy is "the involvement of psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another's situation than with his own situation" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 30). Further, he mentions that the situations triggering the empathetic response often produce similar emotions within the observer as within the person directly affected by the situation.

2.1.2 Cognitive empathy

Psychologists have found evidence that within the concept of empathy there are several systems mediating the response in individuals. One of these systems is 'cognitive empathy'. Here, empathy is a cognitive awareness of another person's thoughts, perceptions, intentions, and feelings (Hoffman, 2000, p. 29; Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009, p. 617). In their article on the two systems of empathy, Simone G. Shamay-Tsoory, Judith Aharon-Peretz, and Daniella Perry (2009, p. 618) describe this ability as an advanced cognitive system of taking someone else's perspective. To put it simply, cognitive empathy means that the individual understands what others feel. Thereby, the cognitive empathy system requires complex cognitive functions. These functions include 'mentalising', 'cognitive flexibility', and 'theory of mind' (ToM). In psychology, mentalising is "the ability to understand one's own and others' mental states, thereby comprehending one's own and others' intentions and affects" (American Psychological Association, n.d.b). Cognitive flexibility is "the capacity for objective appraisal and appropriately flexible action. Cognitive flexibility also implies adaptability and fair-mindedness" (American Psychological Association, n.d.a). Theory of mind is a concept where individuals understand that "others have intentions, desires, beliefs, perceptions, and emotions different from one's own and that such intentions, desires, and so forth affect people's actions and behaviors" (American Psychological Association, n.d.d); thereby understanding what is in others' minds. There is evidence that ToM is present from an early age. Toddlers show some basic principles of the concept, while by the age of three they have some understanding of beliefs and actions. Around the age of four, children can begin to infer false beliefs in other individuals (American Psychological Association, n.d.d). This shows that children from an early age start to develop their cognitive empathy system.

2.1.3 Affective empathy

The 'affective empathy' system is the second system that Shamay-Tsoory and her colleagues (2009) explore. This is, alongside cognitive empathy, a widely known empathetic system within psychology. Hoffman defines this system as "the vicarious affective response to another person" (2000, p. 29). He claims many people would assume that affective empathy is a simple concept because the simplified definition is that one 'only' feels what others feel, and that one "empathizes to the extent that one's feeling matches the other's feeling" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 30). In his experience, though, he has found that the concept is a complex

one. This is something Shamay-Tsoory and her colleagues (2009, pp. 617-618) agree with when they claim humans have a basic 'emotional contagion' system which is thought to support the ability to empathise more emotionally than with cognitive empathy. They describe this system as the ability to "feel what you feel" (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009, p. 618). Furthermore, they discuss emotional empathy having its core structure within the inferior frontal gyrus area in the frontal lobe, where the response to facial expressions and risk aversions lies. This makes affective empathy the system where emotional recognition and emotional contagion take place.

2.1.4 The development of empathy

Martin Hoffman (1984) has formulated four hypothetical developmental levels of empathy. These levels are widely accepted, discussed, and further developed by other researchers and psychologists such as previously cited Susan W. Cress and Daniel T. Holm (1998), and McDonald and Messinger (2011). Hoffman (1984, pp. 111-112) describes his first level of empathy development as 'global empathy'. This level is present from infancy and continues throughout much of the child's first year. It is understood as primitive and a precursor of empathy. This is because, at this early stage of life, the child is incapable of putting themselves in another's state of mind and emotion and imagine what they may be feeling. However, he states that infants may experience some form of empathetic distress. McDonald and Messinger add to the strength of Hoffman's (1984) levels by claiming that research done by Grace B. Martin and Russel D. Clark in 1982, Abraham Sagi and Hoffman in 1976, and Marvin L. Simner in 1971 show that "[t]he specificity of reflexive crying to the sound of other infants' cries supports the idea that there is a biological predisposition for interest in and responsiveness to the negative emotions of others" (McDonald & Messinger, 2011, p. 3). This idea presents a theory that affective empathy has natural predispositions, as infants have little to no cognitive processing skills (Hoffman, 1984, p. 112).

Hoffman (1984, p. 113) calls his second developmental level '"egocentric" empathy'. The child is now able to experience empathy and empathetic distress towards another, knowing that the other is the one experiencing distress, and the self is an observer. Though children at this level know to distinguish themselves from others, they cannot fully differentiate between their own internal state and the other's.

The third of Hoffman's (1984, p. 113) levels is titled 'empathy for another's feelings'. This level begins when children, around 2-3 years old, are at the beginning of their role-taking abilities. They now become aware of the fact that others' feelings and emotions may be different from their own. At the same time, they can also see that individual contexts, needs, and interpretations impact their reactions to a situation. More importantly, he says, that

> because children now know that the real world and their perceptions of it are not the same thing, and that the feelings of others are independent of their own, they become more responsive to cues about what the other is feeling. (Hoffman, 1984, p. 113)

This results in the ability to empathetically respond to sadness and happiness in simple situations by the age of three or four. Another important factor within this level, Hoffman (1984, p. 113) claims, is the acquisition of language. This enables the child to extract meaning from linguistic cues of affect rather than only physical expressions. They may additionally begin to empathise with a wider range of emotions as they become capable of interpreting words related to complex emotions, such as betrayal and disappointment, in addition to the capability to empathise with several emotions at once. At the same time, they may respond empathetically to someone not present based on information about someone's feelings. Cress and Holm (1998, p. 4) claim that this level is where the ability to empathise becomes stronger, as the children develop a stronger sense of self and others. They maintain that language is an important factor in this stage of development.

The fourth and last of Hoffman's (1984, pp. 113-114) empathy development levels is called 'empathy for another's general condition'. This takes place during late childhood when the child is able to empathise with someone else's general condition. This is a result of the unfolding conception of self and other as constant persons separate from each other. Cress and Holm (1998, p. 4) describe this awareness as the ability to empathise with chronic problems of an individual, a group of individuals, or with society as a whole. McDonald and Messinger (2011, pp. 4-6) relate this level to the emergence of cognitive empathy. They describe the preschool and primary school years as the years where the increased language capabilities elicit empathetic reflection, which can lead to significant gains in cognitive empathy. This perspective-taking ability is essential to successfully identify with the experience of another and understand what they feel.

2.1.5 Empathy and literature

Suzanne Keen, in her *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), provides an account of the relationship between reading novels, empathy, and altruism. She begins her presentation by looking at some previous research and hypotheses on the topic. According to Keen (2007, pp. vii-viii), novel reading has been viewed as a stimulation of role-taking imagination and emotional responsiveness. Many conclude, she claims, that this will lead to prosocial behaviour. Although there are quite a few studies looking into the effect of reading on altruism, she finds that the results are inconclusive and often exaggerated in favour of positive outcomes. However, she is sure that readers feel empathy with fictional characters and other aspects of the fictional world. Because of new and modern technology and techniques, she continues, neuroscientists now have the possibility to look more closely into the activation of, and neural basis for, human mind reading and emotion-sharing abilities. It has already been recorded that mirror neurons (a type of brain cell that responds the same way to an action, regardless if one is performing the action oneself or if someone else is (American Psychological Association, n.d.c)) light up by hearing a description of an absent other's actions. This can be linked to the third level of Hoffman's (1984, p. 113) developmental stages of empathy where one's empathy is developed to respond to someone or something not present. This, as a result, thereby substantiates that empathy can be activated by a character in a novel.

Keen (2007, p. xiii) references Hoffman's theories when discussing her own research. One of them is his theory about how novel reading may add to socialisation and moral internalisation. However, Keen (2007, pp. xiii-xiv) claims this theory is difficult to measure because of the prosocial action's possible distance to the reading experience. Her own research, however, proposes that readers' perceptions of fictionality affect empathetic responses as it liberates the readers from self-protection. In other words: readers may respond with more empathy to fictional situations and characters as the fictionality seems safer. At the same time, linking it back to Hoffman, they may still be able to embody the experience of empathy. This may promise a responsiveness to others' needs, which results in prosocial behaviour.

Martha Nussbaum (1997) is an influential scholar who perceives reading novels as one of the core elements for building better world citizens who are capable of love and compassion for others. Nussbaum (1997) claims that "[h]abits of empathy and conjecture conduce to a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community" (p. 90). One of these communities cultivates a response to another's needs and understands that circumstances shape these needs,

while at the same time respecting privacy. Another community builds habits from early childhood through literary imagining. This may inspire concern with the fate of characters and defines them as having a rich inner life that is not all open to view. Thereby, Nussbaum (1997, p. 90) claims that reading stories will lead to responding to and understanding another's needs and inspire concern for others. In addition, she claims that one must learn to respect the hidden inner life of fictional characters as this leads to crediting importance to these conditions while at the same time respecting freedom. This will then lead to compassion, empathy, and social justice. In summary, in the words of Steven Pinker, fiction offers not only the "cognitive advantages of seeing how hypothetical scenarios play out," (Pinker, 2004, p. 50) but also "the emotional pleasures of empathizing with a character" (Pinker, 2004, p. 50). At the same time, one gains understanding and better behaviour.

In her book, Keen (2007, pp. ix-xii) also addresses the gaps in knowledge of potentially empathetic narrative techniques. She says that novels that succeed in summoning character identification are more likely to reach more readers. She found this from readers having felt a strong sense of identification with the characters, saying they feel empathy for them. At the same time, reading novels opened their minds to new experiences, time periods, places, and situations. They additionally felt an understanding of the universality of emotional responses. Character identification thereby invites both affective and cognitive empathy. Although it may sound like one needs to identify with the character on many levels, Keen (2007, pp. x, xii) presents theory claiming that fictional characters and the reader may differ from each other in many ways. This is because empathy for the characters requires only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling. Additionally, the identification may come as a response to the empathy the reader may feel for the characters. Identification can also be related to first-person narration and the interior representation of characters' consciousness and emotions. These narrative techniques, therefore, contribute to empathetic experiences as it opens the reader's mind to others.

Even though identification invites empathy, it does not mean that all readers will identify, and thereby empathise, with the same characters. All readers have different responses to the same stories, and all readers go into the story with different empathetic dispositions (Keen, 2007, p. xii). Keen (2007, pp. xii-xiii) claims the reader's empathy regarding the fictional situation may be elicited by relevance to social, cultural, historical, or economic circumstances. The readers' empathetic response may also differ from what is intended by the author. The authors' choices in making and describing a fictional world play a role in either inviting or

restricting the empathetic response in the reader, depending on their own disposition. For instance, an author focusing on evoking 'situational empathy' (an empathetic response primarily to the plot and circumstance (Keen, 2007, pp. xii-xiii)) may struggle to reach readers without an appropriately correlating experience. At the same time, she claims authors may use their narrative techniques in a way that suggests an empathetic response to an undesirable social situation. Readers may want to reject this notion as feeling with a character whose actions polarises the reader's moral code is distressing. The author can, as a result, believe they have been successful in exercising their authorial empathy. The experience the reader has when believing the author's perspective is wrong, Keen (2007, p. xiii) continues, substantiates the notion that literature elicits emotion and presents different perspectives. However, a strong bond between the empathy of the author and the empathy of the reader is often motivating, which turns out to be a force for prosocial action and altruistic behaviour.

To sum it up, literature and empathy may hold a place in education, and teachers seem to hold an important role in this. Empathy's relation and connection to literature has, according to Keen (2007), been researched and discussed in different forms and for different purposes. Keen (2007, p. xiii) points out that the result of these studies show that literature has a positive effect on readers' ability of empathy. Some also believe, she claims, that the readers' prosocial behaviour will be positively impacted. Therefore, there seems to be a sense of crisis for the people in this field when they see reports on the stark decline in reading. They argue that this decrease may lead to a population less capable of feeling empathy. At the same time, Keen (2007, p. ix) claims there are many who believe that only certain types of novels will provide beneficial effects in terms of emotional response. Popular fiction will therefore often be overlooked, even if this type of literature is more read than older and more classic fiction. Many hold the belief that it is the immersion in culturally valued fiction that fosters the readers to be good citizens. Keen (2007, p. ix) poses the question of what will happen to most of those who consume popular fiction if this is the case. The notion that reading certain types of literature is better for people may limit the reach of reading's effect; from everyone who reads to only the consumers of societally outdated classic fiction. She therefore presents the idea that narrative empathy may be accomplished through the reading of all fiction (Keen, 2007, p. xv). Fiction may, as a result, be brought into the classroom and used as a means to develop empathy. However, Keen (2007, p. xiv) also claims that the effects of discussion combined with novel reading contribute to this. Discussion of the novels, with an asserted leader, gives opportunities for merging reading, role-taking activities, writing tasks, and

teaching. Books will not make change by themselves; they need to be utilised for what they have to offer. The teacher's role in the discussion, based on Keen's claims, is therefore important for developing and fostering empathy. In the next section, I will provide a brief introduction to the ethics of reading literature, followed by the possibilities that lie within LK20 regarding empathy and literature, before introducing close reading and the three narrative elements of fiction that will be the focus of my analysis.

2.2 The ethics of reading literature

When working with empathy and children, one must consider the element of 'ethics'. When hearing the word ethics, one may think of the distinguishing between right and wrong. Though this is partially true, being ethical is more than knowing the difference between helpful and harmful values. It implies that the goal of ethics and being ethical lies in the "concern for the construction of a certain kind of person" (Booth, 1998, p. 42). This means that instead of following absolute rules about what is right and wrong, one should try becoming a person who knows something is generally wrong, for instance lying. However, it also implies knowing that under certain circumstances it may be necessary regarding what is best for the people involved. This ethical aim of building character is favourable to work with in the educational system, as it is a setting constructed for building knowledge and skills. Wayne C. Booth, in his article *The Ethics of Teaching Literature* (1998, pp. 48-49), suggests that stories are an opportune way of achieving this. He claims that stories, besides our parents, is the most powerful ethical influence. It is in responding to, taking in, and becoming transported by a story that character is formed. This makes stories powerful self-creators. Stories and literature will give the pupils opportunities to absorb lessons in how to confront different types of ethical complexity. Booth (1998) says that "[i]t is in dealing with narrative conflicts that [the pupils] imbibe the skills required when our real values, values that are not *merely* social constructs, clash" (p. 48). In other words, and aligning with Maria Nikolajeva's (2006) claim, it is in stories pupils will learn to think about the virtual situations that echo the situations they will meet in the real world.

Booth (1998, p. 49), however, also claims that only presenting pupils with powerful narratives is not enough in itself in constructing character in pupils. Both stories and empathy have the

ability to impact a child's social development, though in this development, teachers should make sure they gain positive morals rather than negative ones. The role of the teacher is therefore important when teaching ethics through literature. Teachers need to find ways of teaching the stories, rather than presenting them. They need to provide space and safety for discussion, as well as enable pupils to be what Booth (1998, p. 49) calls 'ethical' or 'responsible readers'. This is not unsimilar to what Keen (2007, p. xiv) discusses regarding how novel reading contributes to empathy, as long as an asserted leader, or teacher, leads a discussion about the novel and its effects.

To inspire responsible readers, Booth (1998, p. 49) proposes that teachers must enable their pupils to read on three levels. First, the pupils need to learn to naïvely immerse themselves in the narrative and the narrative world. They must learn the fun of being transported into a new adventure and a total escape. This level can be directly connected to the 'suspension of disbelief' – which will be discussed more in a later section – and affective empathy, as this is where the reader will come to know the characters, become engaged with the plot, and feel the emotions that come along with the narrative elements. Second, he continues, they must learn to become the type of readers that are conscious of the values and choices that the implied author or reader tries to convey. The reader becomes aware of how they are being immersed into the story, being it through literary devices, the construction of the story, or the author. This is a level where the reader, according to Booth, must distance themselves from the credulous immersion from the first level and step into a role as an analytic reader. If one connects this level to cognitive empathy, one sees that readers need to be aware of different perspectives, practises, and beliefs so they may investigate and analyse what they mean and the effect they can have on themselves and others. Third, he claims that pupils must learn to become fully critical readers. The pupils need to question both the previous levels: the immersion into the narrative world, and the implied author's opinion about this world and the values that the author is trying to convey. The readers practice critical engagement when they look for dilemmas, problems, or mismatches in values or concepts. Booth (1998, p. 49) concludes that the reader must learn to be aware of how the author constructs the text and tells the story in a way that guides and pushes values through. If all these levels are practiced in the educational system from a young age, there is a larger chance of producing positive ethical effects and character developments, including the skill of empathy.

2.3 The Norwegian national curriculum

All of the above-mentioned concepts, as well as literature and concepts related to fantasy, are incorporated and written into the Norwegian national curriculum. LK20 is a regulation by law and government that decides the content of the Norwegian education. As this document is made by the government and is implemented in legislation, all educators in the Norwegian educational system are required to follow its statements. The curriculum includes a 'core curriculum', subjects, and division of subjects, as well as curriculums for the individual subjects. It additionally includes a framework for assessment (Regjeringen, 2022). The curriculum includes elements of empathy, social development, ethical and critical thinking, and judgement, as well as reading and learning to use texts in different ways to develop social and intercultural competence. This implies that literature, in addition to fostering and developing empathy, contributes to the Norwegian education. This may be rooted in the belief that the above-mentioned concepts are all aspects of humanity, social competence, and subject competence, all of which are important in the Norwegian education.

2.3.1   The curriculum and empathy

The core curriculum (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017) describes the values and principles for primary and secondary education and training. Included here is the goal of helping pupils in developing their values, experiences, identities, and competencies in the meeting between different cultures, skills, knowledges, and perspectives. This can point back to the development of empathy where one understands and feels for different people regardless of their backgrounds. One instance where the core curriculum points to empathy is when they present the idea that

> [p]rimary and secondary education and training is an important part of a lifelong process which has the individual's all-round development, intellectual freedom, independence, responsibility and compassion for others as its goal. The teaching and training shall give the pupils a good foundation for understanding themselves, others and the world, and for making good choices in life. (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 10)

At the same time, there is a statement that mentions empathy directly: "The ability to understand what others think, feel and experience is the basis for empathy and friendship

between pupils" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 11). The curriculum often brings up developing an identity and understanding different cultures. Within these categories, emotion and understanding play a big role. Empathy is consequently a part of this development. The all-round development of a person is important for their later life and is therefore important to develop early. Within this development lies empathy. School is an important arena of a child's development, not only when it comes to subjects. Education and the curriculum are therefore important for the development of empathy and "compassion for others" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 10). At the same time, teachers shall give pupils a foundation for understanding themselves and others. This is an important aspect within empathy as one needs to be able to understand one's own emotions and perspectives to be able to understand someone else's. Further, understanding the world may be connected to cognitive empathy where one needs to be able to understand different people's perspectives, as different perspectives are part of what makes up the world. From this quote, it is clear that empathy is implemented into the Norwegian education, and that the education can impact the way one sees the world and the future person one may become.

In addition to empathy being included in the core curriculum, it is also a part of the individual curriculum for the English subject. This curriculum is divided into competence aims by year: after year 2, after year 4, after year 7, and after year 10. The competence aims build on the aims of previous years. One example of this is a competence aim where the pupils are expected to "participate in rehearsed dialogues and spontaneous conversations about one's own needs and feelings, daily life and interests" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 5) after year 2. This aim develops to "participate in conversations on one's own and others' needs, feelings, daily life and interests and use conversation rules" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 6) after year 4, and "express oneself in an understandable way with a varied vocabulary and polite expressions adapted to the receiver and situation" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 7) after year 7. These competence aims are developed to adapt to the level of knowledge and competence that is expected of the age group. This is also true for the element of empathy. The aims express understanding one's own and others' feelings and needs, as well as adapting to and expressing oneself in coherence with the situation and other people involved. This requires some ability of empathy. As mentioned, one needs to understand oneself to understand others. At the same time, the psychological development of empathy grows into the ability to understand that one's own needs in a situation is not necessarily the other's needs (Cress & Holm, 1998, pp. 4-6; Hoffman, 1984, pp. 111-114). One element of empathy

is therefore the ability to adapt to others and put their needs above one's own. This makes it apparent that empathy is relevant in the Norwegian national curriculum.

The curriculum for the subject of English expresses that English shall aid the pupils in their ability to connect with others and develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living. 'Intercultural competence' is "the ability to understand and respect each other across all types of cultural barriers" (Council of Europe, n.d.a). The Council of Europe (n.d.b) claims this is important for promoting human rights, participating in a culture of democracy, and living peacefully in culturally diverse societies. They have a model of competencies required to become interculturally competent and democratic citizens. One of these competencies is the skill of empathy. In a description of their model, they describe empathy as "fundamental to imagining the cultural affiliations, world views, beliefs, interests, emotions, wishes and needs of other people" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 48). At the same time, the pupils shall work with texts to practice reflection, interpretation, and critical thinking (an objective, rational and systematic analysis of information used to form an opinion on something (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d)). These skills are is believed to develop their knowledge of culture, different ways of living, intercultural competence, their own identity, and the society. This points indirectly to cognitive empathy where one understand others. One additionally sees other competence aims such as "learn words and acquire cultural knowledge through English-language literature for children" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 5), and "investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world and in Norway and reflect on identity and cultural belonging" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 7). To achieve this, one needs to develop and foster both affective and cognitive empathy. One must additionally meet and discuss a variety of cultures and people, both being available in literature. This thesis will therefore not only focus on the developing and fostering of empathy and the possibilities which lies within children's fantasy literature, but also on connecting this to Norwegian education.

2.3.2 The curriculum and literature

While the Norwegian national curriculum holds empathy as an important element of an all-round education, it also believes in using texts as a tool to develop various competencies. The core curriculum mentions the importance of a common reference framework, saying it "connects each individual's identity to the greater community and to a historical context"

(Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 5). At the same time, it gives "room for diversity" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 5), and insights into "how we live together with different perspectives, attitudes and views of life" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 5). The common frame of reference may for instance be a variety of texts and stories that are used and introduced in the classroom, and thereby enforce the goals of the curriculum. In addition to emphasising the positive outcomes and importance of a common framework, the core curriculum claims that "[p]upils who learn about and through creative activities develop the ability to express themselves in different ways, and to solve problems and ask new questions" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 7). Reading literature is a creative activity and therefore aligns with this statement. One last statement from the core curriculum regarding the importance of texts, literature, and reading is that "[s]chool shall support and contribute to the social learning and development of the pupils through work with subjects and everyday affairs in school" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 11), and that

> [s]ocial learning takes place in both the teaching, training and in all the other activities at school. Learning subject matter cannot be isolated from social learning. Bearing this in mind, in the day-to-day work, the pupils' academic and social learning and development are interconnected. (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 11)

This only emphasises the hypothesis of this thesis where reading literature, meaning the subject matter or academic skill, is connected to social competence such as empathy.

Within the curriculum for the subject of English, one of the competence aims related to reading texts and literature is that the pupils shall "learn words and acquire cultural knowledge through English-language literature for children" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 5) after year 2, "learn words and phrases and acquire cultural knowledge through English-language literature" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 6) after year 4, and "read and listen to English-language factual texts and literature for children and young people and write and talk about the content" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 7) after year 7. This competence aim shows that learning to read literature is something that pupils should do in the English subject. Additionally, they should learn to use the literature to acquire cultural knowledge and be able to discuss the contents. As cultural knowledge may give insights into new and different perspectives, achieving this through literature may be connected to empathy, specifically cognitive empathy. In addition, discussions about the contents of literature may not only elicit

emotions towards the characters and actions in the plot; it may also arouse discussions that bring new perspectives and interpretations to the surface, both from classmates and the book.

2.4 Fantasy literature

This section will introduce the concept of 'fantasy literature', as this is relevant to the problem I am investigating. As previously mentioned, reading literature may elicit emotional responses toward characters and their emotions, perspectives, actions, and events. This makes fiction a contributor to affective empathy. It additionally gives an opportunity to take someone else's perspective. The opportunity to gain awareness of someone else's feelings, thoughts, and intentions, can aid the development of cognitive empathy. Literature is additionally written into LK20 as skill the pupils should be introduced to, work with, and learn from. It mentions that "[l]earning subject matter cannot be isolated from social learning" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 11). This implies that learning about and through literature is connected to social development, including empathy.

Fantasy literature is a genre that is distant from reality, while at the same time represents realistic emotions, perspectives, intentions, and thoughts. This makes fantasy literature an appropriate genre to present to children when introducing emotional and personal topics where empathy is a factor. The magical element in the genre acts as a distance from the 'real world', which may make it feel safer to penetrate emotions. It may be less intimidating to discuss and reflect on emotions and other topics relating to empathy when one can connect it to something impossible. At the same time, the characters are often exaggerated and categorised, which is emphasised through the different perspectives and emotions. The plot is often centred around a trial or quest, and a battle between good and bad. This makes the genre accessible and engaging for children. This section will therefore discuss the core elements of fantasy literature to emphasise the relation between fantasy, literature, and empathy, and how these may correlate and add to each other.

2.4.1 Fantasy literature

Fantasy is a genre of literature that is commonly known for its element of magic and the supernatural. Maria Nikolajeva (2006) states that the deviation from what is perceived as reality and realistic is one element of fantasy that most people seem to agree on. This may be introduced in the form of magical beings, objects, events, or a whole universe. Further, she states that common for the representation of magic in fantasy literature is the concept of a secondary world – a concept made popular by J. R. R. Tolkien's essay, *On Fairy Stories,* from 1964. The secondary world is, she claims, an imagined world where the magical and fantastical events take place and a world that is different and removed from the 'real world', also called the primary world. There is also a possibility that the magical elements infiltrate the primary world. Regardless of which way the reader is introduced to it, she continues, the level of magical involvement may vary. On the one side, one can be invited into a whole new universe of magic, where the presence of magic is established and accepted with its own laws, history, and geography. On the other side, one may stay in the familiar world where magic is not accepted as reality. However, it may be introduced in a minor way through an object or creature, enabling the magical requirement of fantasy (Nikolajeva, 2006). The different ways one is introduced to magic can be divided into four categories of fantasy. This will be discussed in the next section.

In addition to magic, Nikolajeva (2006) presents the idea that fantasy introduces a unique relationship between the text and the reader. This relationship may be grounded in what Tolkien (1964, as cited in Nikolajeva, 2006) calls the 'suspension of disbelief'. As previously mentioned, the element of magic can be accepted as real both by the reader and the characters, by consequence of the magic being acknowledged as a natural part of the presented world. Alternatively, the magic can be introduced as a non-accepted element for the characters in the narrative world. Whichever way the author chooses to implement the element of magic, this choice will affect the relationship between the reader and their belief. In other words, readers of fantasy, as well as the characters, must perceive the fantasy aspects of the narrative as true. If the enchantment of believing in the magic is broken, or the suspension of disbelief is disturbed, the relationship between the reader and the narrative may be compromised. In addition, Nikolajeva claims that the reader and the protagonist share a bond in which they both may be hesitant to accept the fantastic as true. Consequently, this may leave both the reader and the protagonist with a dilemma when confronted with it. At the same time, academic historian and writer Farah Mendlesohn (2008) states that "the fantastic is an area of

literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief" (p. xiii). By this she means that the fantastic, magical world, and wonder that the fantasy author has placed between the lines, depends on the reader and their response to the literature. The fantasy is only successful if the readers' expectations of the fantasy category are met, which can be done through multiple literary techniques and devices.

Many view fantasy literature as mere entertainment and as an escapism from a reality that brings the reader into a new and exciting world with magic and dreams. When it comes to the fantasy genre and children, Nikolajeva (2006) argues that the best examples of this type of children's literature form a narrative device that may be seen as a metaphor for reality. She further claims that the previously mentioned secondary world can be interpreted as the protagonist's mindscape; a representation of what they think, feel, and believe: "Fantasy allows the writers to deal with important psychological, ethical, and existential questions in a slightly detached manner, which frequently proves more effective with young readers than straightforward realism" (Nikolajeva, 2006). By this she means there is an opportunity within fantasy to distance oneself from the narrative because of its elements of magic. This may give young readers a way of relating to and understanding the narrative, while also connecting it to themselves, and growing from it in a less disturbing, realistic, and explicit way. It may for instance be easier for a child to understand the struggle of magic, or the battle between good and evil, rather than the inner tension of characters in a relatable world.

2.4.2   *The four categories of fantasy*

Farah Mendlesohn (2008, pp. xiv-xv) argues that there are four categories within the genre of fantasy literature. These categories are determined by the way the fantastic elements are presented into the narrative world. Each category holds its own set of techniques, thereby influencing the rhetorical structuring of the fantastic. There are texts that will appear to cross categories, but these are described by Mendlesohn (2008, p. xv) as exceptions to the 'rules' of the original four. The following section will address these four original categories – portal-quest fantasy, immersive fantasy, intrusive fantasy, and liminal fantasy – and the reader's relationship with these frameworks.

A 'portal fantasy' is, according to Mendlesohn (2008, p. xix), when the fantastic world is entered through a portal. Crucial here is that the fantastic does not move into the non-fantastic world and vice versa. The characters in the text, however, may cross both ways even if the magical world does not. The portal fantasies are almost always also quest novels, which is why this category is merged into portal-quest fantasy. 'Quest fantasy', she claims, is often characterised by the protagonist going from a mundane life without the fantastic to direct contact with the fantastic. The protagonist, she says, then transitions to the point of negotiation with the narrative world through personal manipulation of the fantastic. Merged, portal fantasy and quest fantasy become a narrative that proceeds in a linear fashion and works to meet a goal. She continues saying the reader is required to learn, along with the protagonist, from the first point of entry into the fantastic world, as the category relies on both to gain experience. 'Portal-quest fantasies' thereby become more mysterious throughout the narrative. It relies much upon destiny, which reflects the need to create a rational explanation of an irrational world, while at the same time trying to not destroy the mystery. The protagonist will gradually get to know their world enough to change it and invade into the world's destiny. This technique is, according to Mendlesohn (2008, pp. xix-xx), being used in a way where the reader will ride side by side with the protagonist, hearing and seeing only what they see. Therefore, even if the protagonist is not the narrator, they will provide the reader with the information they receive about the landscapes. Lastly, she mentions the language of portal-quest fantasy, which consists of elaborate descriptive elements seen through the eyes of the characters, which makes the language descriptive and exploratory (Mendlesohn, 2008, pp. xix-xx).

The 'immersive fantasy' presents, according to Mendlesohn (2008, p. xx), the fantastic as a known fact, without comment, and as the norm for both the protagonist and the reader. It invites them to share both a world and a set of assumptions about said world. The assumption of the fantastic as realism denies the need for any explanations, which also adds to the effectiveness of the category. Further, she states that characters do not enter the world of fantastic as they do in portal-quest fantasy, they are already in a fantastic setting. The characters must take for granted the fantastic elements that surround them and exist as integrated alongside the magic, as well as be competent with the fantastic world they know. This means, Mendlesohn continues, that the sense of wonder one finds in portal-quest fantasy is traded for an atmosphere of tranquillity. One language technique she mentions is common in immersive fantasy is the use of irony of mimesis. This may contribute to the normalisation

of the fantastic, horrific, or magic. Though, perhaps the most interesting element of immersive fantasy, is the least magical one. This may be, she claims, because magic takes place everywhere all the time. The fantastic, though not always absorbed in the plot, is embedded in the language of the text or within the interaction between the characters and the setting (Mendlesohn, 2008, pp. xx-xxi).

'Intrusion fantasy' is described by Mendlesohn (2008, pp. xxi-xxii) as the bringer of chaos. The plot is set in a world that the protagonist deems as normal and known to them. This can be either the real world or a fantastic world. Either way, the fantastic is introduced as an intrusive element in this world, and the reader and protagonist are not expected to become accustomed to it. The elements of horror, amazement, and surprise which often comes with the fantastic, are difficult to maintain if they become normalised. Therefore, Mendlesohn (2008, p. xxii) claims an escalation within these elements is important in intrusive fantasy. This may be done through a sense of being taken from safety when the fantastic appear. As there is an assumption that normality is organised, this may, she says, contribute to the horror and amazement. As the fantastic retreats, the world returns to its predictability and norm. The fantastic and magic are often limited and separate elements in the world. This makes the population, aside from the protagonist, Mendlesohn (2008, p. xxii) claims, unable to perceive them and will only experience their effect. According to her, the linguistic techniques are based on stylistic realism, depending heavily on explanations and intense descriptions. She also mentions an unspoken rule where the reader must engage and go along with the point of view of a character, who is usually the protagonist.

"[I]n the liminal fantasy we sit in the subconscious of the point of view character, quietly screaming, 'But something is wrong,' a dream on the point of becoming lucid" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. xxiv). 'Liminal fantasy' is the rarest out of the four categories, and the one which avoids the simplicity of a definition. Mendlesohn (2008, pp. xxiii-xxiv), however, tries to explain by claiming it invites the crossing of a threshold into the fantastic. Though, the significant moment happens in the choosing not to cross and meet the fantastic head-on. The fantastical element in liminal fantasy is therefore centred around the reader's anxiety surrounding a continued preservation of the fantastic. There is an unnerving tone and mode associated with the fantastic, and the possibility of magic is part of the reality. Though it is only presented as a possibility; the protagonist demonstrates no surprise to its existence. This reaction to the fantastic, according to The Afictionado (2018), is what shapes the category, as well as its context; the readers' perceptions can tell that there is something fantastic

surrounding the narrative, however, the text does not match this initial gut feeling. One may say that liminal fantasy casualises the fantastic, resulting in estranging and disorienting the reader because their perception of the fantastic disagrees with the text. This reaction is then exploited, which intensifies the anxiety. Within the category one finds techniques such as an exaggeration of the mimetic style, an adaptation of an ironic mode, twisting the metaphorical structures of fantasy, and construction of a balance right at the edge of belief. The category is, however, according to Mendlesohn (2008, p. xxiv), shaped by doubts, questions, and assertions by the reader, which ends up refining the essence of the fantastic. This has previously been described as the suspension of disbelief.

2.5 Close reading

This section will look at the literary analysis method of close reading. I will use this method for the analyses carried out in this thesis.

'Close reading' is, according to Barbara Herrnstein Smith (2016, p. 57), the primary methodology of literary studies. Though not entirely considered a fully formed methodology, it is "a technically informed, fine-grained analysis of some piece of writing, usually in connection with some broader question of interest" (Smith, 2016, p. 58). In other words, one may say that close reading is an analysis of a text through a specific lens. In literary studies, close reading typically goes for general observations and a wide range of reflections. The observations can be about style, genre, or the author, and reflects on the era in which it was written. The observations and reflections, however subtle and original, usually relate to human circumstances and experiences. Generally, one relates close reading to inferring or identifying meanings, as well as offering or suggesting interpretations (Smith, 2016, pp. 69-70). According to Jasmina Lukic and Adelina Sánchez Espinosa (2011, p. 105), close reading involves attention to features such as language and wording when trying to identify the signalled tensions within the texts' structures. All things considered, one may say close reading is a method of reading and analysing a text with focus on a specific lens or question in hopes of observing some deeper meaning or interpretation. In my case, the broader question of interest is the concept of empathy. I will explore this through attention to the three literary elements of plot, characters, and point of view.

Close reading was established in the mid-20th century and derived from multiple literary approaches, the most prominent being New Criticism. While close reading is about interpreting texts through specific lenses, the New Critics were more concerned with understanding the text's "machinery" and how this worked rather than the establishing of meaning. (Smith, 2016, p. 60). One of the missions of New Criticism became a prequel to close reading: "The students of the future must be permitted to study literature, and not merely about literature" (Ransom, as cited in Smith, 2016, p. 61). Consequently, New Criticism focused only on texts without considering the "external world of politics and society" (Quayson, 2005, as cited in Lukic & Espinosa, 2011, p. 105). This resulted in criticism and debates in the 1960s based on "their ahistorical approach to the literary text, which is understood as a totalised self-contained entity that transcends its immediate social and historical context" (Lukic & Espinosa, 2011, pp. 105-106). Lukic and Espinosa (2011, p. 106) claim poststructuralism and deconstruction suppressed New Criticism's influence, which led to close reading being diminished:

> While an effort is made to reaffirm formalist strategies of reading, the collection more importantly shows the extent to which actual reading practices depend on the questions asked and on how much a supposedly 'objective' method of 'close reading' can produce very different results if applied in different interpretative frameworks. (Lukic & Espinosa, 2011, p. 106)

However, in the 1990s, close reading was reclaimed by feminist reading and teaching. As New Criticism's "restrictive theoretical framework" (Lukic & Espinosa, 2011, p. 107) was removed, close reading became a much-needed tool in modern literary studies, including feminist literary studies and cultural literary studies (Lukic & Espinosa, 2011, p. 107).

2.6 Narrative elements

This section will introduce the three narrative elements of plot, characters, and point of view. They are presented in this order, rather than the order they were presented by Keen, as this is the order I will use in my analysis. These elements are the focus of the analysis and were chosen as they can be connected to experiencing and fostering empathy in the reader. All elements may contribute to identifying and bonding with the narratives, which Keen (2007,

pp. ix-xiii) claims relevant in fostering empathy. At the same time, characters and POV may activate mirror neurons that influence emotional recognition and contagion (Keen, 2007; Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009). The plot may be linked to situational empathy and understanding (Keen, 2007). This may lead to responses from both the affective and cognitive empathy systems. These narrative elements in the fantasy genre may contribute to similar empathetic responses as the plot, characters, and POV hold similar characteristics within the genre. The fantastic plot and characters may at the same time make a safe place for children to feel emotion and empathy (Nikolajeva, 2006).

2.6.1   Plot

M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham (2009, p. 265) discuss characteristics of fictional narratives and give examples of different elements that are usually included in building a plot. They claim the 'plot' in any given fictional work is constructed by events and actions that are used to achieve artistic and emotional effects. The actions of the plot, both verbal and physical, are performed by different characters. The way in which they perform their actions gives the reader insight into their personality, values, and temperaments. These connections that Abrams and Harpham make, intertwine the plot with the characters. Though the plot consists of events, actions, and characters, it is not the same as a story, they claim. A 'story' is a synopsis of a temporal order of what happens. The plot, however, specifies how everything is related, its causes and motivations, and how everything is rendered, arranged, and organised to achieve specific effects (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 265). In fantasy literature, the plot consists of magical events and elements. The plot events are often exaggerated and unrealistic, however, the characters and their emotions seem real and true. The emotional effect is thereby a response to these events, which makes real emotions relate to unrealistic events (Nikolajeva, 2006).

According to Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 265), plots are designed to achieve different types of effects: tragedy, comedy, romance, satire, and so on. This is done through a variety of plot forms. Depending on the effect one wants to achieve, there is an associated plot pattern that can be represented through either drama or narrative, and in verse or prose. In the fantasy genre, one finds the previously discussed categories of fantasy. These designs may elicit different responses in the reader and affect their emersion into the plot. The following presents some elements of plot that are useful to distinguish the different types of plots and

the effects they are meant to elicit. The element of character is important here and is discussed more thoroughly in the next section.

If a plot is understood by the reader as a complete and ordered structure of actions, and distributed to the intended effect, Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 266) claim the plot holds a 'unity of action'. In this, all the prominent events are functional and "so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoint and dislocate the whole" (Aristotle, as cited in Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 266). The order in which the events are presented is an important element in a holistic plot. The sequence of beginning, middle, and end is the most common. Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 267) claim beginnings make one anticipate what is coming by introducing the main event, while the middle section continues the before and requires a follow-up to attain meaning in the plot. The ending, they claim, follows the middle section, and does not require anything else to happen to achieve meaning. Most commonly one sees the climax of the plot, the most important event, in the middle section, however, some authors choose to plunge into the climax as the introduction of the plot. Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 267) refer to this technique as 'in medias res'. According to them, this has the intention of capturing the reader's attention from the very first scene. When this plot element is used it is essential that the reader receives the information that leads to the event at hand. This can either be done by flashbacks, a confession from one of the characters, or inserting narratives or scenes. Another one of their aversions from the 'norm' is the 'double plot'. This is where a subplot, or a second story that is its own complete and interesting plot, is introduced. If the double plot is successful, the subplot may broaden the perspective on the main plot and enhance its overall effect (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, pp. 266-267). These are all plot orders that may occur in fantastic literature; however, the most common sequence is that of beginning, middle, and end.

Within the plot, the actions and events may have their own useful effects. For instance, Abrams and Harpham (2009, pp. 265-266) almost always see a 'conflict' between the protagonist and the antagonist. Sometimes there may even be a conflict between the protagonist and other elements such as fate, or the circumstances between themselves and their goals, desires, or values. They also claim that an 'intrigue' can occur between characters. This is, according to Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 266), when a character initiates a scheme, dependent on the ignorance or gullibility of the person it is directed at for it to be successful. In fantasy literature, this is often seen between the protagonist and antagonist. While they also claim the word intrigue means to arouse curiosity or interest, within the

element of plot this effect is called 'suspense'. As a plot evolves, it builds expectations about future actions and events and how the characters will respond to them. The lack of certainty about what will happen, especially to the characters to whom one has established a bond, is important to drive the plot forward. Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 266) point out that even though the suspense can have predictable outcomes, sometimes the coming action may violate these expectations, resulting in 'surprise'. The interaction between these two plot techniques is important in the traditional plot. The most effective surprise is the one that is grounded in previous events, where the reader has connected the wrong facts. This is usually purposefully done by the author to create the surprise. A surprise ending, however, is where the author resolves the plot without this connection to previous events, but by using highly unlikely coincidences.

2.6.2 Characters

Abrams and Harpham (2009) describe the narrative element of 'characters' as

> the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it – the **dialogue** – and from what they do – the **action**. (p. 42)

In other words, the characters in the plot, their morals, and personalities are decided by what they say and do. Behind the characters' actions and dialogues, both of which affect the readers' interpretations of them, lies a motivation to do and say as they do. According to Abrams and Harpham (2009, pp. 42-43), these can be factors such as temperament, desires, and morals. Sometimes, these elements of the character's motivation or personalities stay stable and unchanged throughout the whole narrative. In fantasy, these characters are usually secondary characters or the antagonist. However, they also claim some may undergo a radical change, which can happen either through a gradual developmental process or be a result of a crisis. These 'dynamic characters', according to Abrams and Harpham (2009, pp. 42-43), usually have important and positive roles to play, and tend to be the protagonist in the fantasy genre. Either way, they add, the reader most likely expects some sort of consistency and expectedness in their actions, meaning the character should not suddenly act in a way that is not grounded in the temperament the reader has come to expect and know.

In addition to stable and dynamic characters, Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 43) distinguish between flat and round characters. A 'flat character', or a two-dimensional character, is built around one single idea or quality. These characters are often presented without many characterised and individual details, which makes it easy to present and describe them in a single sentence. A 'round character' is the opposite of this. They claim these characters are more complex in their temperament and motivation and are therefore presented with more particularity, though in a subtle way. They, additionally claim these characters are more difficult to describe sufficiently and are more likely of surprising the readers. Although both types of characters have their role to play in the plot, they serve different functions. According to Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 43) the flat character, or other characters who do not get a characterisation, often serve only as a functionality. In fantasy, these characters are often characterised as 'the helper'. To be regarded as useful or characteristically successful, the characters need to be more three-dimensional, though this depends on the plot. If the plot is more important than the characters, even the protagonist can be two-dimensional.

Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 43) present different ways of establishing, or characterising, the people in the narrative. One way is by 'showing', also called the dramatic method. Here, the author presents the characters by simply acting and talking. This technique leaves the reader with the opportunity to interpret the motives and dispositions that lie behind their actions. Showing may, they claim, also show the inner thoughts, feelings, and responsiveness of the characters to different events. Another way of presenting the characters is by 'telling', where the author intervenes by describing, and often evaluating, the motives and dispositional qualities of the characters. This may confirm or expand the inferences that have begun to form in the reader based on what has been when before (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 43). These different techniques are used and utilised differently within the four categories of fantasy Mendlesohn (2008) described. While portal-quest and intrusion fantasy rely on telling and describing, immersion and liminal fantasy tend to use showing as their way of establishing characters.

The characters in fantasy literature, according to Nikolajeva (2006), are often categorised into 'hero', 'helper', 'giver', and 'antagonist'. These characters are also present in fairy tales, though there is a difference between the characteristics of these character types within the genres. In fantasy, the hero does not always have the typical heroic features and wants that one sees in fairy tales. Instead of being motivated and excited to perform the task ahead, they may be more reluctant and scared, and even unsuccessful. Often, the goal for the characters in

fantasy is personal growth, rather than the marriage and enthronement which is seen in fairy tales.

2.6.3   Point of view

'Point of view', or POV, signals the way in which the story gets told. A mode is, as Abrams and Harpham (2009, pp. 271-272) present, established by the author to present the characters, dialogues, actions, settings, and events. In other words, the author chooses a point of view in which the reader is invited into the narrative. They continue, claiming throughout time, authors have created different ways of presenting a narrative, though the most common point of views are found in first-, and third-person narrations. 'Second-person point of view' is a rarely used mode of presenting the narrative (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, pp. 272). This is also true for fantasy literature.

In a 'first-person point of view', the narrator speaks as 'I' and is a part of the story as a participant, usually the protagonist. Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 272) declare this limits the narration to what the first-person narrator knows, experiences, or finds out by talking to others. They continue, however, claiming that this may be the very reason for the reader's feeling of implementation into the story and that this may emphasise their identification with the first-person narrator. In contrast, in a 'third-person point of view', Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 272) argue the story is told by a narrator outside the story. This narrator refers to all the characters objectively, meaning by name, or as 'he', 'she', or 'they'. They continue saying this POV can be distinguished into subclasses according to the degree of freedom or limitation that the author undertakes in getting the story across. 'The omniscient point of view' is one of these. Here, they claim, the narrator knows everything about everything. They know all that needs to be known about agents, actions, events, and even the characters' thoughts, motives, and feelings. The narrator, they point out, also has the ability to move in time and place, as well as shift from character to character, and both present and conceal their actions and thoughts. Within this narration, Abrams and Harpham (2009, pp. 272-273) mention what they called an 'intrusive narrator'. This is a narrator who, including reporting, comments on, and evaluates actions and motives, as well as expresses personal views about life. However, the omniscient narrator may choose to be 'unintrusive'. This type of narration, they claim, is less authoritative than the intrusive narration as they, for the most part, describe, report, or show the action in scenes, without the extra comments and judgments. Some may

not even possess the privilege to access inner feelings and motives. They continue by claiming there are more subtle ways of analysing third-person POV. One can distinguish between 'focus of narration' – who tells the story – and 'focus of character' – who perceives what is narrated in a section of the story. Both these types of focuses may shift in a single story from the narrator to a character, and vice versa (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 273).

Another third-person point of view, according to Abrams and Harpham (2009, pp. 273-274), is 'the limited point of view'. In this technique, the narrator tells the story in the third person, but they confine themselves to what is perceived, thought, remembered, and felt by one single character. The selected character thereby becomes the focus, mirror, or centre of consciousness. Continued, they claim the events and actions are represented as they unfold and are filtered to the reader through this in-focus character's perception, awareness, and response. This technique was later developed into 'stream-of-consciousness', which presents outer perceptions as they influence the continuous and current thoughts, memories, feelings, and associations of an observer's awareness. The limitation POV, they say, is often believed to exemplify the objective narration more efficiently than the omniscient POV. Abrams and Harpham (2009) describe the effects of this in a good way:

> In the [omniscient POV], it is said, the reader remains aware that someone, or some outside voice, is telling us about what is going on; the alternative mode, in which the point of view is limited to the consciousness of a character within the story itself, gives readers the illusion of experiencing events that evolve before their own eyes. (p. 274)

This statement shows how the limited POV is more suitable to capture the reader in a feeling of being inside the narrative themselves.

2.7 Ethical considerations

2.7.1 Processing data

As this thesis does not include any personal data, there is no need for processing the data before analysing it. Consequently, there are no ethical issues related to personal data when collecting, storing, or writing. However, there are some ethical issues considering the author

of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,* J. K. Rowling. This is discussed in the next section.

2.7.2 *The controversy of J. K. Rowling*

J. K Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* series, faced criticism after publicly suggesting that transsexual issues can negatively affect women's rights. Though she has denied being transphobic, these comments have been interpreted as being so, making many of her fans, and the fans of the *Harry Potter* series, boycott her works and everything associated with her (Gulley, 2022).

This is brought up in this thesis as the *Harry Potter* books reach many children and may for some be problematic when they are read and used as teaching material, especially when related to the very issue of empathy. There are ethical issues and discussions to be had about this controversy, however, this thesis focuses on the content of the novel without exploring the effects of its author's personal views. Therefore, by only investigating the possible effects of its narrative elements, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* may be explored and used in this thesis without involving the controversies related to its author.

2.7.3 *The researcher*

As stated earlier, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the potentials of fantasy literature for developing and fostering empathy, while also exploring how this may contribute to the ideas, values, and aims of LK20. Therefore, in conducting the study, I as the researcher had to maintain an objective stance. However, as a prospective teacher, I am aware that in that role, I will represent the values promoted in the curriculum. This means that I arrived at the text with a set of values, and I as the researcher must be aware of how these values may influence the choices made in the analysis and discussion. Nevertheless, I pursued objectiveness regarding the analysis and the discussion and consciously tried to maintain this in hopes of reaching trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020).

3   Analysis

This chapter will present the literary analysis of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (also referred to as *Harry Potter* from here on out) and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (also referred to as *Percy Jackson* from here on out). The analysis of the two novels will be presented with a focus on their plots, characters, and POV. Included in the analysis are some excerpts from the novels which substantiate and show ideas related to empathy. This will provide the basis for the upcoming discussion, which is based on the research questions presented in the introduction.

3.1 Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

3.1.1   Plot

Harry Potter takes place in The United Kingdom, presumably around the late 20th century. It is never mentioned in the novel specifically when the plot is set, though based on the descriptions of the available technology and societal trends, the period can be assumed. For instance, the reader learns that Harry's uncle, Vernon Dursley, reads physical newspapers ("About once a week, Uncle Vernon looked over the top of his newspaper and shouted that Harry needed a haircut" (Rowling, 1997, p. 20)), which suggests a timeframe where this was more common than it is with today's modern technology. Though, at the same time, Dudley Dursley, Harry's cousin, receives birthday presents such as "a cine-camera, a remote-control aeroplane, sixteen new computer games and a video recorder" (Rowling, 1997, p. 21). This makes it apparent that the timeframe of the plot is set before or around the novel's release in 1997 but after the invention of computer games and personal cameras. The first video games were invented in the 1950s- and 60s (History, 2022), which dates the plot of *Harry Potter* somewhere between the 1950s and 1997.

Though the time and place of the plot may not be the first element one thinks of when connecting empathy to literature, it does have its importance. As Keen (2007, pp. ix-xii) claims in her book, identification with characters and situations may invite both cognitive and affective empathy. Even though this novel is more than 20 years old, children today may identify with elements of the setting. For instance, some may have ties to the UK. If they do

not have physical ties, they may have an emotional connection to the area. At the same time, there are many elements of the time period that are still relevant today, such as video games, cars, and TV, and everyday things such as going to school and spending time with friends. Keen (2007, pp. ix-xxi) also mentions that a strong identification with the novel is not necessary for eliciting empathy. The simplest, most minimalistic elements of identification may also contribute to empathy. Therefore, only identifying with Harry moving from one place to another or spending time with annoying family members may be enough. This is because minimal identification with new time periods, places, and situations may open for understanding and feeling more of the universality of emotions that are presented.

Based on Mendlesohn's (2008) four categories of fantasy, *Harry Potter* can be categories as a portal-quest fantasy. The novel fits the qualities of this type of fantasy in almost all regards. For one, Harry grows up in 'the muggle world', or the 'normal' world. This world is realistic, and no one knows about magic or anything fantastic, including Harry, at least in the beginning. However, on Harry's eleventh birthday, a magical half-giant crosses from the magical world into the muggle world to tell Harry he is a wizard. This leads to Harry's move from the muggle world to the magical one. As Harry is so new to the world of magic, and the narrator does not give any information to the reader about this world before Harry learns he is a wizard, the reader comes to know the fantastic world and elements alongside Harry. One example of this is when Harry does not know how to get onto platform 9 3/4 to take the train from the muggle world to his new wizarding school. He ends up asking someone for help:

> 'The thing is – the thing is, I don't know how to -' 'How to get on to the platform?' she said kindly, and Harry nodded. 'Not to worry,' she said. 'All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into it, that's very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous. Go on, go now before Ron.' (Rowling, 1997, p. 70)

Both Harry and the reader are oblivious to this new and magical way of getting onto a platform and into the magical world. A new character, the experienced wizard Mrs. Weasley, therefore explains how this is done. By the protagonist being as unaware of and new to the fantastic as the reader, the reader may feel a deeper level of identification to him and feel as though they are on this journey together. This can be a factor that may impact the level of empathy the reader has towards Harry and the people he likes and dislikes.

Another quality that makes the plot of *Harry Potter* conform to the portal-quest fantasy is the element of quest. In her description of quests in fantasy, Mendlesohn (2008, p. xix) describes a linear narrative with a goal to meet. The main goal, or quest, in *Harry Potter,* is to stop Voldemort from getting the Philosopher's Stone and becoming a threat again. While on this quest, Harry and his friends gain small bits of information and must overcome smaller quests and tasks that give them more insights or skills they can use to reach the bigger goal. The following examples illustrate this: Harry receiving information while unknowingly retrieving the stone from Gringots, the wizarding bank, with Hagrid; finding the Mirror of Erised that he will later use to stop Voldemort from getting the stone; and practicing skills of wizard's chess, flying broomsticks, and going to classes, which ends up helping them in the main quest. During their quests, Harry and his friends need to rely both on their magical powers and the knowledge and skills known in the muggle world. This means that both the rational and irrational help them complete their mission. Though even with rationality implemented into the fantastic, the plot becomes more mysterious the more knowledge about their quest they receive. For instance, the plot begins with smaller mysteries such as strange things happening to Harry (the glass wall in the zoo disappearing and the Hogwarts letters being delivered in strange ways), leading to him finding out he is a wizard. After he enters the mysterious and unknown wizarding world, Harry obtains information that adds to the mystery – small hints about the Philosopher's Stone, who tries to steal it, and all the protections around it – and Harry must learn to navigate through it all. The reader may feel they are on a journey with Harry and his friends, and thereby forge a deeper bond with them, which Nikolajeva (2006) claims to be one of the strengths of fantasy literature. This connection between the Harry and the reader may lead to being more willing to feel empathy towards him.

Another quality of *Harry Potter* which aligns with portal-quest fantasy is the way it presents the line of events. Because of its linear fashion, *Harry Potter* moves chronologically from beginning to end. The plot starts with introducing the day Voldemort loses his powers. It continues with following Harry from days before his eleventh birthday, going to school, celebrating Christmas, and taking exams, and ends with leaving school for the summer holidays. Within this chronological timeline, one finds the quests, conflicts, dialogues, and actions are all put into a linear system that is easy for the reader to follow. The narration of the novel fits the criteria of the portal-quest fantasy where the reader is provided insight into the protagonist's thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. This will be discussed more in-depth in the 'point of view' section. The language that presents the plot is descriptive, which again

makes it easier for the reader to gain an understanding of the actions. One sees this clearly when Harry thinks he understands that Professor Snape has something to do with trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone:

> Snape and Filch were inside, alone. Snape was holding his robes above his knees. One of his legs was bloody and mangled. Filch was handing Snape bandages. 'Blasted thing,' Snape was saying. 'How are you supposed to keep your eyes on all three heads at once?' (Rowling, 1997, p. 134)

> In a low whisper, Harry told them what he'd seen. 'You know what this means?' he finished breathlessly. 'He tried to get past that three-headed dog at Hallowe'en! That's where he was going when we saw him – he's after whatever it's guarding! And I'd bet my broomstick *he* let that troll in, to create a diversion!' (Rowling, 1997, p. 135)

These excerpts describe that Professor Snape has been bitten by one of Fluffy's three heads. Harry believes he is trying to get past Fluffy and steal the stone, even if that means setting a troll on the loose. The reader comes to know Harry's suspicions alongside his friends in the fictional world. By presenting information in this way, it may make it easier for the reader to understand the direction the plot is going in connection to this conflict. In other words, the reader gains a more direct and accurate understanding of Harry and his actions and thereby stands more open to feeling empathy with him.

As the plot of *Harry Potter* follows the pattern of a portal-quest fantasy, it opens for empathetic responses in the reader in different ways. As Nikolajeva (2006) describes, fantasy literature can feel like an escape from reality, while at the same time being relatable and opening for identifying with the plot and its characters. This makes it easier, she claims, to understand and sense the feelings of the characters as they result from the irrationality of magic and the overexaggerated conflict between good and evil. For instance, the most obvious conflict of the novel concerns the possible return of Lord Voldemort by stealing the Philosopher's Stone and becoming immortal. This conflict is set up from the very beginning, by introducing the glee of the "strangely dressed people" (Rowling, 1997, p. 8) around London, which is due to the demise of Voldemort. Throughout the plot, the conflict escalates by presenting more pieces of the puzzle: the package from Gringots, the three-headed dog in the forbidden corridor, Nicholas Flamel, the mirror of Erised, and the hindrances protecting the stone. All these elements of the conflict are fantastic, thereby less relatable for the reader.

What is more relatable, however, is the internal conflict of Harry where he feels like an outsider in both worlds. He has no family that loves him, people he does not know recognise him, and Snape and the Slytherins make him feel out of place. These descriptions and actions of the plot and conflict may elicit emotion and identification in the reader. Many young readers are in search of their identity and place in the world, just like Harry. If one feels like an outsider oneself, for instance in their own identity search or as a result of one's circumstances, it may elicit and foster feelings of empathy towards Harry who feels similarly. At the same time, these feelings of empathy may be easier to feel as the fantastic elements of the main conflict can defuse the intensity of these emotions.

3.1.2   Characters

The character analysis will mainly focus on Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Hagrid. These characters all have characteristics and plotlines that may foster empathy in the reader. The reader learns the most about Harry as the narrator can present his inner thoughts. This makes him central to the plot and enables him to have a bigger impact on the reader. Hermione becomes an important person in Harry's life, though later in the narrative. She is one of the few females around Harry that plays a role in his life and his actions. Hagrid is a secondary character, though one with many qualities that make the reader like him. He is also important in Harry's story and life.

Harry Potter

Harry Potter grew up living with his aunt, uncle, and cousin who treated him badly. It is very clear to Harry, and the reader, that they felt he was a burden to care for. Later, one also learns that their dislike for him is partly because he is a wizard, which to the Dursleys, who care about how they are perceived, does not conform with their ideals and values. Their shame and distaste for the wizarding world is described on the very first page:

> The Dursleys had everything they wanted, but they also had a secret, and their greatest
> fear was that somebody would discover it. They didn't think they could bear it if
> anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs Potter was Mrs Dursley's sister, but they
> hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister,

because her sister and her good-for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was possible to be. The Dursleys shuddered to think what the neighbours would say if the Potters arrived in the street. The Dursleys knew that the Potters had a small son, too, but they had never even seen him. This boy was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want Dudley mixing with a child like that. (Rowling, 1997, p. 7)

This passage shows the energy that surrounded Harry's childhood. It is not surprising that Harry, because of this, felt like an outsider in his own home. He was treated unfairly – on grounds of something he did not do – because of what he and his family were. This has the possibility to foster empathy as one can identify with this or begin to understand him and his view of the world. One may also respond with situational empathy, which can foster cognitive empathy. The Dursleys are presented in a way that shows characteristics that usually do not align with Western social values, such as discrimination, and their distaste for children and everything different than themselves. At the same time, they are embarrassed by the mere association of the Potters. By using words such as "good-for-nothing husband" and not wanting their son to be around "a child like that", they present a discriminating, negative attitude. Harry, despite the values and attitudes surrounding him, grows into a boy one would consider good and loyal. This may make the reader respond with empathy towards him as they may relate to him and feel more for him as they know his backstory. Consequently, it may be more difficult to side with and understand the Dursleys.

Feeling like an outsider follows Harry from the muggle world to the wizarding world. Being a wizard is completely new to him. At the same time, he is recognised by everyone as someone special, making Harry feel out of place. Harry knows little to nothing about the wizarding world, how it works, and what to expect. This alone makes him an outsider. One example of this is when Harry and Ron take the train to Hogwarts:

'What are these?' Harry asked Ron, holding up a pack of Chocolate Frogs. 'They're not *really* frogs, are they?' He was starting to feel that nothing would surprise him. 'No,' said Ron. 'But see what the card is, I'm missing Agrippa.' 'What?' 'Oh, of course, you wouldn't know – Chocolate Frogs have cards inside them, you know, to collect – Famous Witches and Wizards. […] 'So *this* is Dumbledore!' said Harry. 'Don't tell me you'd never heard of Dumbledore!' said Ron. (Rowling, 1997, pp. 76-77)

This excerpt presents the idea that Harry is ignorant of even the small elements of the wizarding world. For instance, Harry does not know about the different sweets available, or what famous witches and wizards look like. Therefore, it is not a stretch to assume he feels like an outsider. This is something many children can identify with when entering a new environment. Consequently, they may connect more with Harry, and understand him and his actions and thoughts on a deeper level. In other words, by identifying with Harry and bonding with his character, there is a possibility for the reader to experience both affective and cognitive empathy toward him.

Harry learns a lot about himself throughout the narrative. He never felt like he fit in in the muggle world, though by learning his true identity he becomes more sure of who he is and what matters to him. One can therefore categorise Harry as a dynamic character, as he continues to develop different sides of himself throughout the novel. This alone opens for more fostering of empathy as he is constantly learning, trying to do what is right, and protect the people he cares about. This is clear in the way he stands up for Neville Longbottom when Malfoy steals his Remembrall in the ninth chapter of the novel. Never has anyone stood up to protect Harry, yet he still knows this is what he should do. This shows he cares about people, a characteristic that can strengthen the bond between the reader and the character. This bond may invite both affective and cognitive empathy. When one cares about someone and it feels like one knows them, even if that someone is a character in a novel, one can argue that it may open to feel more of the emotions portrayed by them and understand their point of view in different situations.

Hermione Granger

Hermione Granger, one of Harry's best friends, was born to muggle parents. This makes her, in theory, an outsider in the wizarding world, just like Harry. However, she has more knowledge and skills related to being a witch, as she spent much time reading and practicing before entering the world of wizardry. Throughout her plotline, one may have the impression that her knowledge and skills may be an overcompensation for trying to fit in at Hogwarts. This is because she uses her knowledge as a tool to show everyone that she is capable even though she was not born into a wizarding family. This, however, makes her seem "bossy"

(Rowling, 1997, p. 79), "interfering" (Rowling, 1997, p. 115), and some may say a know-it-all:

> 'Are you sure that's a real spell?' said the girl. 'Well, it's not very good, is it? I've tried a few simple spells just for practice and it's all worked for me. Nobody in my family's magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it's the very best school of witchcraft there is, I've heard – I've learnt all our set books off by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough – I'm Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?' (Rowling, 1997, p. 79)

The excerpt shows the way in which Hermione speaks to others for the first half of the novel: a lot of content, a lot of knowledge, and not a lot of pauses. This makes her someone that annoys Harry and Ron for quite a while, as they feel she tries too hard. However, coming Halloween, the boys save her from a troll, and she takes the blame for breaking the rules. After this, the three are inseparable. Hermione becomes less inclined to share her knowledge in a know-it-all way and starts to use it in a helpful way. Her priorities also shift from learning and doing everything by the rules to being there for her friends (though learning and rule-following are still the runners-up): "'I knew it,' Hermione gasped. 'Snape – look.' […] 'He's doing something – jinxing the broom,' said Hermione. 'What should we do?' 'Leave it to me.'" (Rowling, 1997, p. 140). As Hermione's motivations are made accessible to the reader, she may be defined as a round and dynamic character. The access to her emotions, perspectives, and thoughts gives the opportunity to enhance affective and cognitive empathy. Affective empathy can be fostered by feeling and identifying with Hermione, thereby sharing her emotions. Cognitive empathy can be accessed by understanding her motivations and seeing the different situations and actions from her perspective.

Hagrid

Hagrid, even though he is a secondary character, plays a big role in Harry's life. He is the one who tells him the truth about who he is, and someone Harry trusts and cares about. If the reader has connected, identified, and felt empathy towards Harry or some of his friends, most likely they will have positive feelings towards Hagrid. This is because the trust and emotional connection that may have developed between the reader and some of the characters, can make one trust and care about the people they care about. At the same time, Hagrid has many

characteristics, morals, and motivations that correlate with modern Western values, such as being kind, and caring – towards both humans and other creatures – fair, and wanting the best for everyone. One can see examples of this continuously throughout the novel, both from his own actions and others' comments and statements about him: "'I would trust Hagrid with my life,' said Dumbledore." (Rowling, 1997, p. 16). This statement makes it clear that a great wizard and man trusts Hagrid. One also sees his characteristics when he is trying to comfort an overwhelmed Harry:

> 'Don' you worry, Harry. You'll learn fast enough. Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts, you'll be just fine. Just be yerself. I know it's hard. Yeh've been singled out, an' that's always hard. But yeh'll have a great time at Hogwarts – I did – still do, 'smatter of fact.' (Rowling, 1997, p. 66)

Further, he comforts Harry after Malfoy plants insecurities in him about growing up in a muggle family:

> 'Yer not *from* a Muggle family. If he'd known who yeh *were* – he's grown up knowin' yer name if his parents are wizardin' folk – you saw 'em in the Leaky Cauldron. Anyway, what does he know about it, some o' the best I ever saw were the only ones with magic in 'em in a long line o' Muggles – look at yer mum! Look what she had fer a sister!' (Rowling, 1997, p. 61)

These excerpts show that Hagrid cares about Harry and that he tries to comfort him by sharing his views and experiences. At the same time, he does not discriminate based on circumstance. The descriptions that are provided of his character may, for those who hold the same values as him, contribute to building a bond with him, and thereby invite feelings of affective empathy. For instance, when Hagrid says goodbye to his pet dragon, his actions showed emotional distress and caring: "'An' I've packed his teddy bear in case he gets lonely.'" […] 'Bye-bye, Norbert!' Hagrid sobbed, […] 'Mummy will never forget you!'" (Rowling, 1997, p. 175). Because of the bond that may have been built between the reader and Hagrid, the reader may mirror the distress that Hagrid is feeling during this action, and any other actions where Hagrid's emotions are described or shown.

3.1.3 Point of view

The point-of-view that takes place in *Harry Potter* is a third-person limited point of view. For most of the novel, the narrator is confined to Harry and his thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and perceptions. However, in the first chapter, when Harry is only a baby, the narrator is confined to Uncle Vernon for the first half. In addition, when Harry plays his quidditch matches, the POV shifts from a focus on Harry and what he perceives, to be more omniscient and focus on the perspectives from the stands. These are the only instances where the POV changes. The rest of the novel is told from an outside perspective with an insight into Harry's emotional and cognitive life.

The invitation into Harry's thoughts and perspectives gives an opportunity to get to know him, his motivations, and his values more than any other character. The reader gets to follow his perspective on living in fame, being a new wizard, juggling between being a good friend and following rules, and figuring out who he is while also trying to save the Philosopher's Stone. The reader, therefore, is invited to explore his perspectives and perceptions of different situations. For example, the narrator presents Harry's state of mind and perceptions leading up to the sorting hat ceremony:

> Harry's heart gave a horrible jolt. A test? In front of the whole school? But he didn't know any magic yet – what on earth would he have to do? He hadn't expected something like this the moment they arrived. He looked around anxiously and saw that everyone else looked terrified too. No one was talking much except Hermione Granger, who was whispering very fast about all the spells she'd learnt and wondering which one she'd need. Harry tried hard not to listen to her. He'd never been more nervous, never […]'. (Rowling, 1997, p. 86)

It is clear from the excerpt that Harry feels nervous. Instead of describing that Harry looks nervous or showing his nervousness through action (which is done for the other characters), the POV is giving the reader access to how he is feeling at that moment. This may evoke a stronger feeling of personal distress towards another in the reader as the language is more descriptive. If the reader identifies with, or feels a connection with what they observe, they may be more likely empathise with him. The readers may additionally identify with the feelings that are presented. Depending on the reader's previous experiences and their attitudes towards the emotion elicited by Harry, it may lead to invites or restrictions of empathy towards him.

In addition to presenting the reader with Harry's thoughts and feelings, it is clear from the descriptions that the narrator views the situations and characters from Harry's perspective. For instance, in Harry's first meeting with Malfoy, he is described as "a boy with a pale, pointed face" (Rowling, 1997, p. 59), just before he starts talking negatively about others. This description seems to have some negative connotations. The narrator, instead of describing Malfoy with characteristics fitting the energy he gives out, describes his physical features in a way that conforms to stereotypical features of someone stuck up and mean. This description and energy repeats itself in the first few meetings between Harry and Malfoy, and is substantiated by Malfoy's mean actions. The same technique is used in meeting Professor Snape: "Professor Quirrell […] was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin" (Rowling, 1997, p. 94). This description is very similar to Malfoy's as both point out features about the skin and face. A few pages later, when Harry meets Snape for the first time rather than only seeing him, this description is continued: "Snape […] looked up at the class. His eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels" (Rowling, 1997, p. 102). In this description, one still is presented with physical descriptions that are stereotypically villainous with the "black", "cold", and "empty" eyes. However, one additionally sees a reverse comparison to Hagrid, whom the narrator has already described and presented as a warm, kind, and caring person. This emphasises the negative connection Harry has with Snape. Because the narrator presents others via Harry's perspective, the reader is presented with descriptions and perceptions that align with this. This may influence even more the reader's empathetic response. If the reader has made a bond with the protagonist, and the narrator describes his enemies in negative ways, most likely the reader will have little affective empathy towards them. Consequently, the reader may have more affective empathy towards the characters that Harry likes and whom the narrator thereby describes more positively. It may also restrict cognitive empathy towards the enemies as the reader may not want to understand their POV in situations.

The point-of-view of the novel, along with its plot, gives the reader the possibility to experience situations not available to them in their own lives, as well as see and encounter the perspective(s) of the protagonist, Harry, and his friends in these situations. The reader may or may not relate to Harry's childhood. Either way, they can see and experience what it may be like to grow up in an emotionally abusive home, where Harry is treated like a servant and a burden. The reader is additionally presented with the opportunity to experience the feelings

and thoughts that come with being an outsider, being famous, facing terrifying situations, breaking rules, and so on. By giving the reader this possibility, they can evoke an emotional reaction in the reader where they feel the same feelings as the characters. At the same time, the reader can explore and immerse in the perspective of the characters in the situation. This gives the opportunity to develop cognitive empathy and gain a greater understanding of why the characters react as they do, and why they have become the way they are. It opens for new perspectives on values, ideas, and situations, or may substantiate and broaden a perspective they already hold. Either way, by following Harry's perspective, the reader is presented with situations and perceptions that may foster their cognitive and affective empathy toward him.

3.2   Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief

3.2.1   Plot

Similar to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,* the plot of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* meets many of the criteria of the fantasy genre. On the one hand, one can say it is written as a typical portal-quest fantasy. Percy, who grew up in the 'normal' world, is oblivious to the fantastic world in which he ends up playing a big, important role. Therefore, when he is taken through a portal into Camp Half-Blood, he begins his journey by getting to know not only this new world of Greek gods and magic, but also himself through new experiences, trials, and an important quest to save the world. In addition to going on a literal quest and walking through a portal into the camp filled with fantastic elements, Percy finds it difficult to accept the fantastic. Therefore, as is the norm in portal-quest fantasies, the fantastic is not an accepted truth in the primary world: "I was used to the occasional weird experience, but usually they were over quickly. This twenty-four/seven hallucination was more than I could handle" (Riordan, 2005, p. 16); "'[b]ut they're stories,' I said. 'They're – myths, to explain lightning and the seasons and stuff. They're what people believed before there was science'" (Riordan, 2005, pp. 67-68). As the reader is only hearing and seeing what Percy does, they are experiencing the learning and discovering alongside him. This, for many, creates a stronger bond with Percy.

On the other hand, the novel meets some of the criteria of an intrusive fantasy. For instance, one sees that the fantastic is an intrusive element in the world Percy grew up in. The Furies

intrude on Percy's day at the museum with his class, and on the bus when trying to reach Los Angeles. In addition, one finds gods traveling between worlds, magic in the Las Vegas casino, Medusa owning a business on an abandoned road, and other monsters and magical beings Percy and his friends end up meeting along the way. These intrusive elements of the fantastic create surprise and amazement, which is needed to keep the fantastic form being normalised. The elements add suspense to the plot and create obstacles that Percy and his friends need to meet and overcome, and thereby grow from. Another characteristic of intrusive fantasy is the fantastic taking the protagonist away from safety. This is true for Percy. As he learns more about the new world, the old world becomes less safe for him, and he is taken away to Camp Half-Blood and safety. Still, after a few days, he must go on a quest to save the fantastic world, and thereby put himself back into danger. Lastly, the fantastic in the novel is limited within the primary world as 'normal' people do not perceive the magic and monsters exactly in the way it happens. They do, however, experience their effects:

> 'They won't attack us with witnesses around,' I said. 'Will they?' 'Mortals don't have good eyes,' Annabeth reminded me. 'Their brains can only process what they see through the Mist.' 'They'll see three old ladies killing us, won't they?' She thought about it. 'Hard to say. But we can't count on mortals for help. […]'. (Riordan, 2005, p. 162)

The fantastic elements are presented in a way where Percy may be hesitant about the new world at first. However, he ends up accepting it through meetings with monsters and creatures. As Percy is the narrator, he brings the reader on a journey through hesitations, acceptance, learning, amazement, danger, fighting monsters, failing, and all the emotions that come with all the new elements in his life. This may create a bond between the characters and the readers. As mentioned above, the reader can feel as if they are on this journey with the characters, and the bond this may create can make it easier to relate to the characters. Consequently, this can most likely make the reader more understanding of what Percy and his friends are going through, including their reactions and actions, as they may become more real and believable to them. The bond, relation, shared experiences, presentation, and belief in the fantastic may make it easier to evoke emotions and empathy in the reader. If the reader does not immerse themselves in the fantastic, the bond may break, leaving less hope for the fostering of empathy.

Within the plot of *Percy Jackson,* there are some plot events that may resonate with the readers, thereby making it easier for them to identify and relate to the plot. One repetitive plot action is having to face something scary, or something one is afraid of. This can be as simple as facing a person that one finds intimidating, like when Percy talks to Mrs. Dodds, whom one later finds out is a Fury:

> Mrs Dodds stood with her arms crossed in front of a big marble frieze of the Greek gods. She was making this weird noise in her throat, like growling. Even without the noise, I would've been nervous. It's weird being alone with a teacher, especially Mrs Dodds. (Riordan, 2005, p. 11)

Sometimes, simply talking to someone one is not comfortable with can make one afraid, and sometimes this person can do something that makes one uncomfortable. This is something Percy describes here. And although many of the scary events in the novel are in the domain of the fantastic, it does not take away from the emotions and relatability.

Another relatable situation in the plot is being misunderstood. This seems to happen quite often to Percy. For one, in the primary world, he is viewed as a troubled kid, which to some degree is true. Though, the reasons behind his actions are misunderstood. The headmaster at Yancy Academy, a school for troubled children, believes his actions are rooted in simple entertainment. However, his actions often stem either from his ADHD or his demigod tendencies. In addition, one can see he is misunderstood when he is wanted by the police, and the media along with Gabe, his stepfather, tells the world what a troubled and dangerous person he is. In the fantastic world, he is misunderstood as someone who would steal and lie at the cost of peace.

Many children can relate to being misunderstood and thereby identify with Percy and the events where his actions and motivations are misinterpreted. The possibility of identification with the plot elements, settings, experiences, or situations, may deepen the bond between the reader and the characters, leading to the prospect of fostering empathy as described earlier. At the same time, the emotions experienced by the characters in these situations, combined with the reader's identification, can lead to a greater possibility of affective empathy. If one recognises one's own experience in a situation, it may lead to emotional contagion in response to someone else's similar experiences, and thereby the possibility to "feel what you feel" (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009, p. 618).

Some of the more specific plot actions and settings may elicit more cognitive and situational empathy. These are instances where the reader may not have similar experiences. Some readers may have gone through something similar, though as these situations are more specific in their representations, they are not relatable to everyone. However, they may still foster empathy in the reader. For instance, Percy ends up losing his mother. In the end, the reader finds out that she did not actually die, but for a big portion of the novel it is believed so. Unfortunately, there are those who identify with losing a parent, but for many, this is something they have not experienced. The same can be said for Percy growing up in an abusive home, changing schools often, being betrayed by a friend, and having an absent father. Even though these are realistic, but rarer events, they may evoke empathy in the reader. If one looks at Percy's absent father, Poseidon, for instance, he is absent because of his responsibilities as the god of the sea. However, the feelings of abandonment, distance, and low-value Percy experiences in relation to him being away are valid. This can elicit cognitive and situational empathy in the reader even if they have not experienced anything like this in their own life:

> 'I have admitted my wrongdoing,' Poseidon said. 'Now I would hear him speak.' Wrongdoing. A lump welled up in my throat. Was that all I was? A wrongdoing? The result of a god's mistake? […] I got the feeling Poseidon really didn't know what to think of me. He didn't know whether he was happy to have me as a son or not. In a strange way, I was glad that Poseidon was so distant. If he'd tried to apologize, or told me he loved me, or even smiled, it would've felt fake. Like a human dad, making some lame excuse for not being around. I could live with that. After all, I wasn't sure about him yet, either. (Riordan, 2005, pp. 341-342)

This excerpt presents realistic emotions that, for readers who have not experienced an absent parent, still may feel real and attainable. As it is described in such detail it is allowing the possibility to gain a better understanding of Percy's emotions, and thereby also seeing and feeling the situation from his perspective.

There are, however, actions that are impossible (if one does not believe in the fantastic). The conflict is built around the Greek gods arguing about Zeus' lightning bolt being stolen, and Percy having to go on a quest to retrieve it and prove his innocence in its disappearance. Being threatened by Medusa and attacked by a Chimera is not an everyday, realistic occurrence, however, it does not mean that the reader does not feel empathy for the character

in the situation. As Nikolajeva (2006) claims, this only gives the opportunity for the reader to distance themselves from the heavy impact of realistic psychological and existential situations and focus on the emotion in a slightly dethatched manner. This may make it feel safer and less intimidating to allow oneself to feel the emotions that the characters are experiencing. Thereby, it opens an opportunity to foster empathy in a way that feels safer for the reader.

3.2.2 Characters

The character analysis will focus on Percy Jackson, the protagonist, Annabeth, Percy's friend and quest-partner, and Luke, a camp-friend who turns out to be the antagonist. These characters all have something to contribute when it comes to empathy. Percy is the narrator and may therefore influence how the reader perceives other characters. This also means that the reader will have a direct line into his emotions and motivations. Annabeth becomes friends with Percy. However, their relationship is sometimes affected by their parent's feud. Despite this, they open to each other. This may create a bond with the reader and present them with more emotions. Luke is introduced as a trusted friend to everyone. He acts with kindness and care and gives off energy that can make one empathise with him. However, he turns out to be an enemy, which can make the reader conflicted and/or change their response to him. This may affect their established bond, and thereby the affective response negatively. At the same time, given the information the reader possesses about him, it may positively affect the readers' cognitive empathy.

Percy Jackson

Percy Jackson is a character that many children can relate to. This is especially true if they have already experienced some difficult and "out of norm" things in life. For instance, Percy is diagnosed with both dyslexia and ADHD. These diagnoses affect him, his emotions, his self-image, and how he lives his life. When describing the effects of his diagnoses ("Words had started swimming off the page […]. There was no way I was going to remember the difference between Chiron and Charon […]. I paced around the room, feeling like ants were crawling around inside my shirt" (Riordan, 2005, p. 18)), it is clear he does not believe in himself academically. This can be very relatable for many children who struggle with something similar and can strengthen their bond and attachment to Percy. His ADHD may be

the reason for making decisions that are not thought through: "Go ahead, call me an idiot for walking into a strange lady's shop like that just because I was hungry, but I do impulsive stuff sometimes" (Riordan, 2005, p. 173). This instance leads to being threatened by Medusa. These characteristics sometimes lead to negative interactions, emotions, and outcomes, which are, for many, easy to identify with. However, they also come into play in positive ways. The ADHD helps Percy come through many altercations with monsters and gods as it heightens his reflexes and attention to detail. His dyslexia does not stop him from understanding important content and only works as a hindrance when reading the Latin alphabet. For readers struggling with these diagnoses, this description and presentation can be uplifting and hopeful. The identification with Percy's struggles and experiences with these characteristics can lead to being more open to affective empathy as a lot of the emotions Percy is experiencing regarding this is relatable to them. Therefore, even though one may not experience it oneself while reading or listening to the novel, one may feel the same emotions as Percy in these moments. If one does not identify with these characteristics, there is still a possibility for the fostering of cognitive empathy. One may still understand why something is difficult or sad even if one has not experienced it oneself.

Percy is a dynamic character. He experiences a lot in a small amount of time. This makes him grow as a person and look at situations differently at the end of the novel than he did in the beginning. He is struggling with anger and impulse control in the readers' first meeting with him. Having been expelled and suspended from numerous schools because of this, it is a big indication of growth when he by the end chooses not to turn his stepfather into stone:

> I *could* solve her problem […] I could start my very own statue garden, right there in the living room. […] That's what Gabe deserves. […] I remembered the Underworld. I thought about Gabe's spirit drifting forever in the Fields of Asphodel, or condemned to some hideous torture behind the barbed wire of the Fields of Punishment […] Did I have the right to send someone there? Even Gabe? A month ago, I wouldn't have hesitated. Now… (Riordan, 2005, p. 351)

By showing restraint in getting revenge on someone so undeserving of his goodwill, he shows values such as kindness, strength, and reflection, as well as ethical judgment. His adventure taught him valuable lessons, and the readers may learn something from this as well. The reader may therefore gain personal understanding from Percy in his growth. They may see and experience the emotions, motivations, and adventures that have led to him making

different decisions later in the novel. This opens for cognitive empathy where the readers gain enough information to be able to understand why Percy feels the way he does.

One element that stays static throughout the novel is Percy's love and devotion to his mother. This is first presented at the beginning of the novel: "Her name is Sally Jackson and she's the best person in the world […] (Riordan, 2005, p. 29). This love continues and is shown consistently through emotions, motivations, and descriptions. When she is presumed dead, Percy describes himself as "weak and scared and trembling with grief" (Riordan, 2005, p. 55) and wanting to "lie down and cry" (Riordan, 2005, p. 55). He believes the loss of his mother should be reflected in the whole world as that is how big the loss feels: "My mother was gone. The whole world should be black and cold. Nothing should look beautiful" (Riordan, 2005, p. 59). Sally is his biggest motivation for going on the quest into the Underworld, with the hope of retrieving her. When they are finally reunited, he admits his eyes were "a little misty" (Riordan, 2005, p. 347). The love Percy has for his mother is relatable for many readers and is therefore a possible factor for the elicitation of affective empathy. The emotion he describes throughout may resonate with the readers, and they may imagine what it would feel like for them in the same situation. This may elicit the same emotions in the reader as in Percy and may contribute to fostering empathy.

Annabeth Chase

Annabeth, daughter of Athena, is one of the two characters Percy brings along on his quest to retrieve Zeus' lightning bolt. Though she and Percy develop a friendship, it is not apparent this will happen from their first few meetings. For instance, Annabeth, who is initially introduced as just another camper, ended up being showered in toilet water by Percy, which she does not appreciate. Additionally, she is the one who presents both Percy and the reader with information about his father and her mother, who do not get along. Sometimes their parent's feud comes in the way of their developing friendship:

> Finally I said, 'So we have Athena to thank for this monster?' Annabeth flashed me an irritated look. 'Your dad, actually. Don't you remember? Medusa was Poseidon's girlfriend. They decided to meet in my mother's temple. That's why Athena turned her into a monster. […] That's why Medusa wanted to slice me up, but she wanted to preserve you as a nice statue. […] My face was burning. 'Oh, so now it's *my* fault we

met Medusa.' […] 'Forget it,' I said. 'You're impossible.' 'You're insufferable.'
(Riordan, 2005, p. 185)

It is clear from this excerpt that Percy and Annabeth sometimes let their parents' feud come between them. At the same time, Annabeth is very ambitious, which prevents the two of them from becoming friends in the beginning as she is more concerned with receiving a quest. When Percy is offered his quest, Annabeth volunteers to aid him straight away, in the hopes of being able to put her abilities in strategy and fighting to the test: "'I've been waiting a long time for a quest, Seaweed Brain,' she said. 'Athena is no fan of Poseidon, but if you're going to save the world, I'm the best person to keep you from messing up.'" (Riordan, 2005, p. 148). Again, the feud between Poseidon and Athena has an impact on how Annabeth views Percy. Annabeth's ambition towards the quest, however, stems from her living at Camp Half-Blood all year round for many years. She feels, as a result, as if she has never experienced the real world:

> 'Yeah. It didn't work out for me living at home. I mean, Camp Half-Blood *is* my home.' She was rushing her words out now, as if she were afraid somebody might try to stop her. 'At camp you train and train. And that's all cool and everything, but the real world is where the monsters are. That's where you learn whether you're any good or not.' (Riordan, 2005, pp. 169-170)

Annabeth's characteristics of ambition and loyalty towards her mum may act as a hindrance in her friendship with Percy in the beginning. However, it is clear from this excerpt and Annabeth opening up to Percy that they are bonding and beginning to trust each other. The bond that grows between them may impact the reader's response to Annabeth, and thereby affect the fostering of empathy. It may be because Percy is unsure of her at the beginning of their relationship, and her determination to stay loyal to her mum, that the reader may spend more time connecting with her and empathetically respond to her. However, as the two become closer and Percy begins to trust and open up to her and vice versa, the reader may begin to trust her as well.

One of the bonding elements Annabeth and Percy connect on is their upbringing and homelife (before Annabeth moved to Camp Half-Blood), Annabeth's bearing similarities with Percy's:

> 'He doesn't care about me,' she said. 'His wife – my stepmom – treated me like a freak. She wouldn't let me play with her children. My dad went along with her.

Whenever something dangerous happened – you know, something with monsters –
they would both look at me resentfully, like, "How dare you put our family at risk!"
Finally, I took the hint. I wasn't wanted. I ran away.' (Riordan, 2005, p. 201)

From here, the two keep a close friendship with trust and loyalty, despite their parents' feud. This may influence the reader to be more open to responding empathetically to Annabeth, as they have received more information about her background: why she is so ambitious, and why she does not let people in easily. The readers may experience affective empathy when learning about her background and how this has affected her, as they may respond with emotions more suitable to her situation than to their own experiences. They may, in addition, foster cognitive empathy as the opportunity to gain an understanding of her motivations, thoughts, and emotions is presented to them.

Luke

Luke, son of Hermes, is introduced as Percy's counsellor at camp Half-Blood. He is in his late teens and described as "tall and muscular, with short-cropped sandy hair and a friendly smile" (Riordan, 2005, p. 84). From this, there is no reason to not trust him. However, he turns out to be the antagonist of the story. Before this is revealed in the last chapter, Percy and his friends trust Luke and value his opinions and advice. Luke gains this trust by explaining the new world to Percy and making him not feel stupid and out of place. In addition, they have conversations about feeling like outsiders. Percy feels Luke is one of the few people who understands his conflicting emotions during the first few days at the camp:

He seemed to understand how lost I felt, and I was grateful for that, because an older guy like him – even if he was a counsellor – should've steered clear of an uncool middle-schooler like me. But Luke had welcomed me into the cabin. He'd even stolen me some toiletries, which was the nicest thing anybody had done for me all day. (Riordan, 2005, p. 101)

This excerpt shows that Percy trusts Luke and feels like he is being welcomed and understood. This declaration of trust from Percy heightens the possibility of the readers trusting Luke. As the declaration is presented in a first-person narration, and therefore directly

from Percy. This brings the reader closer to Percy and his thoughts. It additionally gives the readers an opening in connecting with Luke and thereby feel empathy toward him.

In addition to being relatable, trustworthy, and nice, Luke's backstory and life is presented in a way that may elicit empathy, both cognitive and affective, towards him. As the son of the "wing-footed messenger guy" (Riordan, 2005, p. 101), Luke feels unappreciated. He feels as if he is neglected and that his potential is overseen. This is substantiated by his father giving him a quest that has already been given to – and successfully completed by – Hercules. Making it worse, Luke ends up failing to complete the quest. The reader may feel affective empathy towards Luke throughout the plot when learning about his life, how he has been living at Camp Half-Blood, how his father does not seem to care about him, and him failing his quest and being remembered for it afterwards. These are situations and experiences where Luke feels emotional and is described as looking emotional. The reader may then respond with similar emotions and thereby build a connection with Luke. However, when Luke is revealed as the antagonist, the trust and connection between both Luke and Percy, and Luke and the reader, may diminish. This, however, does not mean that all empathy in relation to Luke's character is gone. As the reader knows Luke through the narrative and is presented with his backstory, it brings along the opportunity to understand where his role as the antagonist comes from and see his actions through his perspective. The motivations behind stealing Zeus' lightning bolt are explained in the last chapter, which gives the reader even more material to foster their cognitive empathy:

> 'Where's the glory in repeating what others have done? All the gods know how to do is replay their past. My heart wasn't in it. The dragon in the garden gave me this -' he pointed angrily at his scar – 'and when I came back, all I got was pity. I wanted to pull Olympus down stone by stone right then, but I bided my time. I began to dream of Kronos. He convinced me to steal something worthwhile, something no hero had ever had the courage to take. […]' (Riordan, 2005, p. 366)

The anger portrayed in this excerpt tells the readers that Luke feels overseen. Therefore, when someone sees him for who he is and persuades him to do something unique and brave, he must do it to prove a point to the evil Kronos and to himself. For many readers, this is an opportunity to take the perspective of an antagonist and understand why they make the decisions they make. Because of this, Luke is an ambiguous character who fosters both affective and cognitive empathy.

As shown earlier, Percy, the protagonist, serves as the first-person narrator in *Percy Jackson*. This means that the reader will only be allowed access to his personal perspective of the world and the events that take place. This narrative technique invites the reader into the narrative and may make them feel like a part of the plot. This invitation is prominent from the first page:

> Look, I didn't want to be a half-blood. If you're reading this because you think you might be one, my advice is: close this book right now. Believe whatever lie your mom or dad told you about your birth, and try to lead a normal life. (Riordan, 2005, p. 1)

In this excerpt, the reader is written into the text, making the narrator, or Percy, speak to them directly. This may contribute to creating or inviting a connection between the reader and Percy. They may feel as if Percy is having a conversation with them, and in this case, warning them about the dangers of being a half-blood. The bond that may flourish from this POV may contribute to fostering empathy as it is usually easier to empathise with someone one knows, identifies with, and has a connection with than someone who feels distant (Keen, 2007, pp. x, xii).

The first-person narration allows access to the narrator's thoughts, emotions, and motivations, which may give the reader a better understanding of the protagonist. For example, when Percy believes his mother has died, he brings the reader along on the thought process about what may happen to him: "I was alone. An orphan. I would have to live with … Smelly Gabe? No. That would never happen. I would live on the streets first. I would pretend I was seventeen and join the army. I'd do something" (Riordan, 2005, p. 60). Here, the reader is brought into Percy's thought process. This is evident from him asking himself questions and answering them, as well as coming up with a plan for what would be best for him. The passage also reiterates the unhealthy situation he experiences at home, as he would rather be homeless than live with his stepfather. Presenting his thought process may foster cognitive empathy. This is because the reader gains an insight into his perspective on situations and contexts. Another example is when Percy must choose between saving the world from war or saving his mother:

> I turned and faced my mother. I desperately wanted to sacrifice myself and use the last pearl on her, but I knew what she would say. She would never allow it. I had to get the

bolt back to Olympus and tell Zeus the truth. I had to stop the war. She would never forgive me if I saved her instead. (Riordan, 2005, p. 317)

The thoughts, though not a process where Percy brings the reader along, still give the reader a view of Percy's motivation and perspective of what is most important. He shows that he is selfless and that he values his mother's opinion. By presenting these characteristics and values, the reader may gain a greater understanding of Percy, his thoughts, and his emotions, and thereby foster cognitive empathy.

The first-person narration may additionally foster affective empathy. When describing his or others' emotion, Percy may elicit emotional cognition in the reader. There are many instances in the novel when emotion is warranted. Most of the emotions described are anger, fear, love, and sadness: "My knees were jelly. My hands were shaking so bad I almost dropped the sword" (Riordan, 2005, p. 13); "Zeus was punishing the whole camp because of me. I was furious" (Riordan, 2005, p. 138); "If I talked about my mother, I was going to start crying like a little kid" (Riordan, 2005, p. 321); "I'll admit it – my eyes were a little misty, too. I was shaking, I was so relieved to see her" (Riordan, 2005, p. 347). Not all these descriptions tell the reader explicitly the emotion in question, however, context, experience, and recognition make the emotions relatable to the reader. As Percy describes what happens to his body and mind when feeling his emotions, the likelihood of emotional cognition heightens. This is due to the explicit account of what happens to his or others' body and mind. Therefore, the interior representation of emotion and consciousness through the first-person narration gives many opportunities for fostering affective empathy.

4   Discussion

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the potentials of fantasy literature's fostering of empathy and explore how the genre's potential relations to empathy may contribute to the ideas, values, and aims represented in the Norwegian national curriculum. This chapter will discuss the analyses of the novels in light of the research questions, employing the theories discussed in Chapter 2.

The first section of the discussion explores the first question: How do the narrative elements of plot, characters, and POV contribute to fostering empathy in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*? I will discuss this question by looking at empathy in connection to the narrative elements and looking at similarities and differences in the novels. The section will be divided into 'plot', 'characters', and 'point of view' so that each narrative element receives a thorough investigation.

The second part of the discussion looks at the second question: How may developing empathy through fantasy literature contribute to the aims of the Norwegian national curriculum? This section connects the previous discussion to LK20 and proposes ways in which they may contribute to the Norwegian education of primary school pupils in the English subject.

4.1   Empathy and the novels

4.1.1   Plot

Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 265) claim that the plot of any fictional text is made to achieve an emotional effect. Even though this description is quite simple, one can already see the connection to empathy when purposefully trying to elicit emotion in the reader through events happening in the narrative. Therefore, the plot may be used to evoke what Keen (2007, p. xxi) defines as situational empathy. For instance, the analysis of *Percy Jackson* points to situations where Percy is misunderstood, when he loses his mother and gets her back, and where he deals with the repercussions of his absent father. These situations may not be relatable for everyone reading the novel yet may still elicit cognitive and affective empathy. There are also situations in *Harry Potter* that can evoke situational empathy. Harry grows up

in an abusive home and feels like an outsider in both social environments presented in the novel. At the same time, each novel's conflict concerns preventing a war, though with different approaches. Even though all readers may not identify with and relate to these events and situations, they can, as Hoffman (2000, p. 29) and Shamay-Tsoory et al. (2009, pp. 617-618) claim, experience and foster cognitive empathy as they may understand and be aware of Harry's and Percy's thoughts, perspectives, intentions, and emotions in these situations. The readers may also experience affective empathy towards non-relatable situations in the novels. Such situations may elicit feelings in the reader that are more suitable to Harry's and/or Percy's experiences (Hoffman, 2000, p. 30). This element of the plot, where the readers are presented with situations and events they do not necessarily relate to, may therefore still foster both types of empathy, which is true in both *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson.*

As *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* are both fantasy novels, they both hold characteristics that align with this. These characteristics may invite identification, which Keen (2007, p. xii) claims opens for understanding and feeling for the characters. For instance, both novels have elements that coincide with Mendlesohn's (2008, pp. xix-xx) portal-quest fantasy, as they enter a secondary world where they feel out of place. This can resonate with the readers and make them identify with the situation the protagonists are going through, as they may have gone through similar struggles themselves. Another of her characteristics of portal-quest fantasy is the reader learning about the new world alongside the protagonist, which is the case in both novels. The reader hears and sees only what either Harry or Percy does, which may connect the narrative to the reader's world and create a bond between them. This fantastic technique, and the bonding it may create, can foster empathy as the reader may feel connected to the protagonist. This may make the readers more understanding and feel emotions towards them. At the same time, the bond that comes from experiencing the fantastic alongside Harry and Percy can make the reader feel more immersed in the fantastic as well. This may, as a result, strengthen the suspension of disbelief that Nikolajeva (2006) discusses, which may make the reader more available to be emotionally affected by the plot and characters, as they feel as if they are part of the fictional universe.

Another element Keen (2007, pp. xiii-xiv) discusses is that of fictionality and how this may impact empathetic responses. This may also point back to the suspension of disbelief. She claims that immersing oneself in the narrative and fiction may liberate the reader from their own emotional protections and thereby open themselves to being more empathetic. This aligns with Nikolajeva (2006) and her claim that fantasy literature gives the opportunity to

deal with deeper emotions in a way that feels safer and less personal to the reader. The plots of both *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* may therefore contribute to this. For Harry, trying to stop Voldemort from returning is his main mission. On this mission, he must face a troll, a cursed broomstick, a three-headed dog, and a dangerous chess board. These events and elements are all fantastic and thereby unrealistic. However, if readers immerse themselves in these events and choose to believe they are real, they may feel more empathy towards the characters and events. Similarly, Percy's mission is to find Zeus' lightning bolt, prove his innocence, and stop the coming war. In his quest, he faces monsters, gods, and magical objects. Though, as opposed to Harry, Percy faces many of these fantastic elements in his primary world (intrusive fantasy). The readers must still immerse themselves in the fictionality and fantastic; however, the intrusive elements keep the fantastic from being normalised. Consequently, this can bring the fantastic closer to home for the reader and challenge their suspension of disbelief. It is therefore important in fostering empathy that readers do not break the bond between themselves and the plot. If they are able to obtain the bond towards the fictionality and the fantastic, they may foster both their cognitive and affective empathy: the cognitive by understanding the characters and their intentions, thoughts, and emotions in all situations, including the fantastic ones; and the affective by responding with emotions towards the plot and characters that is now strengthened through the suspension of disbelief.

4.1.2 Characters

According to Abrams and Harpham (2009, pp. 42-43), the way in which readers interpret characters may depend on their actions and dialogues. Behind these actions and dialogues are where the characters' moral sense and personalities lie, as well as their motivations, temperament, and desires. Consequently, the way in which the reader interprets the characters can affect their level of identification as well as their bond and connection to them. These factors also emphasise the fact that characters in novels are comparable to 'real' people. This can be pointed back to Hoffman's (1984) levels of empathetic development. During the third level is when children develop the ability to respond empathetically to someone who is not present in the situation, solely through information about their feelings and lives. If the characters in the novels are similar to the readers in experiences, values, motivations, and emotions, they may, as Keen (2007, pp. ix, xii) suggests, open for responding with empathy.

The characters that were analysed in *Harry Potter* were all different from each other. Harry is brave and loyal, even though he feels like an outsider. The fact that he has gained values such as kindness, loyalty, and bravery despite his childhood is impressive and may make him likable. This can make readers more open to empathetic responses toward him. Hermione is clever, intelligent, and ambitious, while Hagrid is soft, caring, and kind. These differences between them make it more likely for the readers to relate and/or identify with the characters. It is the same in *Percy Jackson*. The characters show their values and characteristics through actions and dialogue. For instance, Annabeth is intelligent and confident, which may open for connection between readers and the character. The bond stemming from characteristics and values in the characters may, as Nussbaum (1997, p. 90) claims, inspire a concern for them, and readers subsequently being more open to understanding their needs and emotions. In other words, identifying and relating to the characters' personalities and values may foster cognitive empathy.

Relating to and bonding with characters may also lead to affective empathy. Shamay-Tsoory et al. (2009, p. 618) underscore that affective empathy is a result of emotional recognition and contagion, which results in feeling what others feel. At the same time, Hoffman (2000, p. 29) claims that affective empathy concerns an emotional response to another person. This can mean that identifying with characters in a novel and creating a bond with them may affect the depth and sum of emotions the reader responds with. If, for instance, the reader has bonded with Harry, they are, as a result, more likely to connect with Hagrid. Therefore, when Hagrid shows emotion, like he does when he must give up Norbert the dragon, the reader is more likely to recognise his emotion and respond to it with similar emotions. This may be an instance of emotional contagion. Similarly, when Percy indicates emotions related to low self-esteem, his diagnoses, or his deep love for his mother, the reader may recognise his emotions and adopt them.

However, relating to and understanding characters may not be as straightforward as it can be with characters like Harry, Hagrid, Hermione, Percy, and Annabeth. Sometimes one meets characters like Luke from *Percy Jackson,* who is more ambiguous. His true nature and motivations may lead to a breach of trust and bond, which may impact the reader's empathetic response. Much like the suspension of disbelief Nikolajeva (2006) discusses, breaking an established bond between the reader and a character can compromise the response from the reader. When the reader finds out that Luke is the antagonist of *Percy Jackson*, the previous trust that may have been established through his actions, as well as through Percy's and

Annabeth's perception of him, may break. Consequently, this can lead to the reader retracting their previous relation and connection to him, which may impact their empathetic response negatively. At the same time, it can leave the reader confused as to how to respond to his misfortunes and his emotions. It may also make the readers feel less sure about their stance regarding the conflict. Luke's ambiguousness can therefore impact the reader's affective empathy in multiple ways, which aligns with Booth's (1998, pp. 48-49) claim that readers absorb lessons in confronting ethical complexity. In confronting Luke's ethical complexity, the reader can learn skills related to dealing with ethical conflicts by becoming aware of how their own values may clash with Luke's. It can additionally foster their cognitive empathy. An understanding of Luke's perspective in *Percy Jackson* is more available than an understanding of Voldemort's in *Harry Potter*. Throughout the narrative, the reader has gained information about Luke through his actions, which he later uses in his reasoning for stealing the lightning bolt. These are reasons such as feeling neglected, not appreciated, and mocked. In these reasons, the reader may understand his perspective and motivations. However, in *Harry Potter,* the reader does not have access to Voldemort's intentions, motivations, and backstory. Therefore, he is more static and flat than Luke, making it less likely for the reader to understand him in the same way. Luke is therefore more effective in fostering cognitive empathy than Voldemort.

4.1.3   Point of view

The types of narrations used in *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* are techniques used by the authors to invite the reader into the narrative (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 272). The choice of narration may have an impact on the readers' response to the narrative and its characters. Booth (1998, p. 49) claims the reader must become aware of how the author constructs their text, tells the story, and pushes values through as one way of obtaining the most effect from reading. The author's construction through narration can for instance affect the level of identification towards the characters, the bond they establish, their understanding of them, and their emotional response. By being aware of the narrative techniques that immerse them into the narrative, such as POV, the now responsible reader, according to Booth (1998, p. 49), becomes conscious of the values and beliefs within the text. This awareness may lead to cognitive empathy as being aware of different perspectives, practices, and beliefs may lead to an understanding of the characters. For instance, in *Harry Potter* the reader gains insight into

Harry's inner life: his thoughts, emotions, motivations, and values. This can make the reader feel closer to Harry, understand him, and respond more emotionally towards him than towards other characters where descriptions of their emotions, motivations, and values are simplified to their actions, dialogue, and physical reactions. However, the third-person limited POV that is used is objective in the way that it refers to all characters with third-person pronouns (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 272). This can create a small distance between the reader and the characters, including Harry, which may affect the bond and thereby the empathetic response from the reader. In *Percy Jackson,* however, Riordan uses a first-person POV. This narration, according to Abrams and Harpham (2009, p. 272), invites the reader into Percy's inner life. They receive a unique invitation into his motivations, thoughts, and emotions. Even though readers experience this to some degree with the third-person limited POV in *Harry Potter*, the first-person narration may feel more personal as the narrator expresses and describes themselves using pronouns such as 'I', 'my', and 'me'. This may, as Keen (2007, p. x) claims, open the reader's mind to Percy's. At the same time, the reader is written into the text in *Percy Jackson* as Percy talks directly to the reader. This may again contribute to making the narrative more personal to the reader compared to 'only' being presented the events, thoughts, and emotions in an objective way, as it is in *Harry Potter.* Consequently, the reader may feel a deeper connection to the plot and characters in *Percy Jackson* than in *Harry Potter*. This may result in fostering affective empathy on a deeper level as the reader can react and feel the characters' emotions on a more personal level.

The POV used in the novels influences the language used to present the reader with information and descriptions about events, emotions, and other characters. This may, according to Booth (1998, p. 49) and Hoffman (1984, p. 113), influence the fostering of cognitive empathy as the presentation and awareness of information and techniques can open to understanding the characters, their motivations, and emotions. In addition, the readers are being presented with the characters' emotions in action. This may, as a result, lead to the fostering of cognitive empathy as one receives an opportunity to follow someone else's emotions and understand how they think and feel, and how they may be different from oneself (Keen, 2007, pp. x-xii). At the same time, descriptions of the characters' emotions and reactions may elicit emotional contagion and activate mirror neurons, thereby fostering affective empathy (Keen, 2007, p. viii). In the analysis of *Harry Potter,* for instance, instances such as "[h]e looked around anxiously and saw that everyone else looked terrified too" (Rowling, 1997, p. 86) may activate this. "A test? In front of the whole school? But he didn't

know any magic yet – what on earth would he have to do?" (Rowling, 1997, p. 86) presents the reader with information about why Harry and the others are nervous and thereby gives the reader an opportunity to understand their emotional reasonings, including how they feel, which results in the fostering of cognitive empathy. Additionally, the analysis of *Percy Jackson* presents excerpts where the reader must interpret the emotions presented through Percy's interior representations and the language which is used. In other words, they must activate their emotional understanding and recognition (cognitive empathy) to undergo emotional contagion (affective empathy).

Lastly, the POV used in the novels may present the readers with the opportunity to experience events and social situations they have not, and maybe will not, experience in real life. This may broaden their understanding of others and their emotions as it can add to their repertoire of social meetings and opportunities in exploring others' thoughts, perceptions, perspectives, and emotions. All these elements are included in cognitive empathy (Hoffman, 2000, p. 29; Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009, p. 618). These hypothetical scenarios may, as Pinker (2004) claims, give the reader the cognitive advantages and "emotional pleasures" (p. 50) of feeling empathy towards a character, and thereby foster cognitive and affective empathy. This is true for both *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson*, as both novels offer the reader plot events and social interactions that many readers have never experienced, and never will, due to their fantastic elements. In *Harry Potter,* one can explore the interactions between Harry and his friends and enemies, and his meetings with monsters and magic. The meeting between Harry and Professor Quirrell at the end of the novel, for instance, may elicit an emotional response and understanding in the reader. Readers may respond to what Harry experiences even if they have not experienced it themselves. In *Percy Jackson,* one can foster empathy from his experience of facing his father for the first time, and the emotions and actions that are a consequence of this.

4.2   The Norwegian National Curriculum

The discussion until now has focused on the question of the narrative elements in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* versus *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, and how they may foster empathy. This section will look at the second research question: How may developing empathy through fantasy literature contribute to the aims of the Norwegian

national curriculum? This question connects the possibility of fostering empathy through fantasy literature to the Norwegian English subject classroom's deliberate learning and development.

The Norwegian national curriculum works as a statutory guideline for teachers. This means that teachers must deliberately work towards the goals that have been set for the Norwegian school children. However, there are no required methods that teachers must use to meet these goals. Therefore, reading and discussing fantasy literature may be used to reach the aims related to empathy.

Up until now, the thesis has explored the idea that fantasy literature can foster empathy. This may happen through identification and bonding with characters. Keen (2007, pp. ix-xiii) claims that more readers feel empathy towards a character they identify with, however minimal the identification may be. This may lead to the readers being more open to understanding others, as well as allowing themselves to experience something new. This method of fostering empathy can be utilised when working towards the goals regarding identity and understanding oneself, developing values, and compassion for – and connection with – others (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). Developing an identity is mentioned regularly throughout the curriculum and is highlighted as important. By identifying with characters in a narrative, pupils may gain a more concrete idea of who they are, whom they want to be, and the values they want to live by. The characters in the narrative may have characteristics the pupils identify with. This may lead to a realisation about themselves and their own characteristics and identity. At the same time, identifying and bonding with a character may lead to developing intercultural competence, which the Council of Europe (n.d.b.; 2018, p. 48) deems important for developing interculturally competent and democratic citizens; and they claim empathy is required in this development. If one identifies and empathises with someone of different cultures and backgrounds, one may experience that these differences do not mean that they are 'worse' than oneself. Additionally, the pupils may understand that the differences do not necessarily hinder communication or understanding of one another. Rather, despite the differences in culture and background, a lot of the time the motivations, emotions, and responses are similar to one another. By seeing, feeling, and experiencing through a person one identifies and connects with, one may become more aware of oneself and one's own emotions, values, and motivations, as well as the empathy and understanding one may have for another.

Point-of-view and perspective-taking in novels may contribute to the fostering of cognitive empathy by opening for understanding another person, their emotions, and motivations. Booth (1998, pp. 48-49) claims this builds ethical and social knowledge and skills when suggesting the confronting of ethical complexities in novels. It may also foster affective empathy as the elements allow for a direct line into the characters' inner lives where they express and feel emotions. This can lead to emotional contagion. By fostering empathy in this way, these elements of literature may contribute to the aims of the national curriculum by developing an understanding of others, and intercultural competence. Because of the direct line into another person's consciousness, there is a possibility to greater understand how someone else thinks and feels. The descriptions of what the characters do, why they do it, what they feel, and how they process it can make pupils aware of another person's sense of themselves and the world. One may also attain a greater understanding of someone who is different from oneself. These differences may be based on culture and background – thereby contributing to intercultural competence – or on motivation, values, or morals. If the pupils experience the latter, one may, with help from teachers and discussion, develop one's critical thinking. All the above aligns with Booth's (1998, p. 49) three levels of responsible reading. Where one with affective empathy allows oneself to immerse into the narrative (level one), one develops cognitive empathy by awareness of the values, motivations, and construction of the narrative (level two). This awareness is something the teacher can work towards achieving in their pupils. One may also be able to obtain information from and about the characters through the POV and their perspectives on a situation. This information can, as suggested by Booth (1998, p. 49) and Keen (2007, p. xiv), be used in objective discussion between pupils (with the teacher as the asserted leader) where the goal is to think critically about the motivations or values behind an action (level three). Consequently, fostering empathy through POV and perspectives may be a useful tool in reaching the goals of the national curriculum.

The situational empathy that can occur when reading fantasy literature may contribute to the aims of the Norwegian national curriculum in multiple ways. Situational empathy may come about when something in the plot triggers the readers' emotions, or when they feel like they have experienced something similar (Keen, 2007, pp. xii-xiii). This type of response can be related to both affective and cognitive empathy. On the one hand, it opens for an understanding of someone else's situation and emotion, how they react, and why, even if they have not experienced it themselves. On the other hand, if the reader feels they have experienced something similar, it may elicit emotions in the reader that correlate with the

character's emotions in the situation. Fantasy literature is often connected to exaggerated and fantastic actions and situations. However, the emotions and motivations of the characters are often relatable and real regardless of the circumstance. This can, as both Keen (2007, pp. xiii-xiv) and Nikolajeva (2006) claim, make fantasy literature a safe place to experience these emotions as the situations related to them do not carry the weight of readers' real-life constraints. These responses to situations in literature can contribute to the aims of LK20 focusing on understanding oneself and others, connecting with others, and on creativity and imagination. Because the important situations, or plot events, in fantasy literature tend to be on the fantastic and unrealistic side, the pupils may develop their creative abilities and imagination through a response to these actions. By developing their imagination and creativity, they may additionally be developing their problem-solving skills, which is an additional aim the Norwegian government has for its pupils (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 7).

As mentioned, by placing these ideas about the fostering of empathy through literature into the genre of fantasy, one may claim that the exaggeration and unrealities of the plot can introduce a safe place for allowing oneself to feel emotions and empathy on a larger scale (Nikolajeva, 2006). It may not feel as daunting and intimidating to feel the emotion if the reason for it is that someone's mother was squished to death by a Minotaur, or a teacher having the face of one's enemy at the back of their head. This may lead to a stronger sense of empathy as one may allow oneself to feel emotions when they are disguised and integrated into the fantastic. Therefore, fostering empathy through fantasy literature may aid the development in a less intimidating way than if the readers feel the plot is too real. In connection with the Norwegian national curriculum, one may say this contributes to the goal of developing individuals' all-round development, including social development, intellect, independence, responsibilities, and compassion. As empathy may contribute to better understand others as well as oneself, this may connect to independence, compassion, and feelings of responsibility towards the other. Empathy may also contribute to social competence as an understanding of and compassion towards others in a social context may make the interaction positive and meaningful. The development of cognitive empathy may relate to intellect as one has to understand that another person's emotions and perspectives may differ from one's own, though are still as valid as one's own. All in all, one may claim that fostering empathy through fantasy literature may contribute to the Norwegian national

curriculum in multiple ways and can therefore be an influential method to use in Norwegian classrooms as a way to meet its aims.

5   Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have explored and discussed how the narrative elements of plot, characters, and point of view in fantasy literature may contribute to the fostering and development of empathy, with a focus on its affective and cognitive systems. This has been carried out through analysing the narrative elements of plot, characters, and POV in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*. The discussion has led to an exploration of how this may contribute to the Norwegian national curriculum and its aims and goals for Norwegian pupils. In investigating the research questions, I have presented theory connected to empathy and its development, fantasy literature, and LK20, and the connection between them. At the same time, I have suggested some ethical considerations related to this. Through this theory, and by looking at and exploring the mentioned novels, I have found that the narrative elements foster empathy through factors such as identification with characters or events, bonding with the narrative and its characters, the suspension of disbelief, and fantastic events making for a safe place for children to experience and explore their own and others' emotions. The POV in which the characters, events, and emotions are presented to the reader may influence the above-mentioned factors. At the same time, emotional cognition and recognition may be related to empathic response in the reader through language techniques such as the use of pronouns and the presentation of emotions. Together, these elements can foster both cognitive and affective empathy. Some elements may contribute more towards the cognitive empathy system where understanding someone else's emotions, perspectives, and motivations is essential; and some may foster affective empathy where one feels emotion towards others' emotions and situations.

Empathy can be described as important for individuals and society as it can impact social interactions, values, and actions. It is therefore important to consistently work towards its development. School and education may be a good arena for this, and literature a good tool. The Norwegian national curriculum includes aims and values that coincide with elements related to empathy, literature, and fantasy. If social and intercultural competence, consideration for others, understanding, openness, and inclusivity are related to empathy, literature is a fruitful method to achieve this, as well as widen perspectives and experience different views of the world. At the same time, imagination and creativity, both being aims in LK20, may be related to fantasy and its characteristics. Fantasy literature and its narrative

elements can, because of everything described above, be a means to foster and develop empathy, while at the same time contributing to the goals and aims of LK20.

This thesis highlighted the significance of empathetic abilities as it contributes to the individuals' social functioning, and thereby the society and relationships between people. The value of empathy is shown through the discussion of the novels and the national curriculum. The thesis can therefore enlighten teachers' views on the importance of empathy and how this may contribute to and be utilised in English subject classrooms in Norway. Going forward, teachers and other significant people in a child's life should consider the value of literature's ability to foster and develop empathy when educating and raising their children.

To conclude the thesis, I wish to highlight that even though previous research has claimed that empathetic abilities lead to prosocial behaviour, there is not enough, or strong enough, evidence that shows this to be true. Future researchers should therefore study the effect empathy may have on children and their social interactions, as well as the degree to which children feel and respond empathetically towards characters and events when reading novels. At the same time, this thesis only focuses on the fantasy genre for children. Future studies should therefore direct their focus towards other genres and age groups as a way to broaden the possibility of generalisation to the claim that empathy can be developed and fostered through literature.

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