Horrifying Empathy
A comparative study of empathy in Stephen King’s Pet Sematary and The Shining, with a discussion of the use of horror literature in the EFL-classroom.

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Abstract

This essay is a comparative analysis of the novels *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* by Stephen King, where the empathy that the characters may invoke is analyzed. The focus lies on the children, mothers and fathers of the two families featured in the novels, who are analyzed in terms of Leake’s division of easy or difficult empathy. The essay also discusses the use of horror fiction in the EFL-classroom and how it may train students’ ability to empathize and motivate reluctant readers. The child characters mainly offer easy empathy since they experience negative emotions and victimization. The adult characters appear to be more nuanced, especially the two fathers who may invoke a combination of easy and difficult empathy through their change towards antagonists, or through their abusive behavior. Due to King’s complex characters, and suspenseful storytelling, it is possible that horror fiction of this kind can be used in the EFL-classroom to attract reluctant readers. As the students also come in contact with difficult empathy they can train their ability to understand and empathize with people who may act in ways that the students normally would disagree with. In that regard, it appears that horror fiction can have a pedagogical use in the EFL-classroom.

Keywords

Cognitive literary criticism, Empathy, Pet Sematary, The Shining, the EFL-classroom.
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1 Introduction

In the Swedish National Agency of Education’s *Curriculum for the upper secondary school* (2013), one of the first fundamental values that is supposed to permeate the Swedish school concerns the understanding and compassion for others:

The school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise. No one in school should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment, or to other forms of degrading treatment (4).

This, according to the National Agency of Education, can be accomplished by the understanding of others, and through empathy (4). One issue with this statement is the question of how teachers are supposed to teach empathy to their students. A generally accepted opinion is that literature can invoke empathy in the readers, which is illustrated in the way many literary courses at universities are seen as “ways to “humanize” future doctors, engineers, and members of the professional-managerial class by cultivating empathy” (Hammond and Kim 8).

The effect of empathy in literature is something that has been researched to a great extent in the field of cognitive literary criticism. One of the major researchers on the subject of empathy is Suzanne Keen, author of the book *Empathy and the novel* (2007), which has been said to “refin[e] the vectors and strategies of empathy and literature” (Hammond and Kim 10). However, there is still much potential for further studies in the field of cognitive literary criticism, with focus on the aspect of empathy and its pedagogical use. One such gap, is the question of whether or not certain genres of literature are more suitable than others to invoke empathy in students. This essay aims to address that gap, by analyzing the novels *Pet Sematary* (1983) and *The Shining*
(1977) and discuss the use of horror literature in the classroom. The focus is on how this genre can invoke empathy, and how that specific genre of fiction can help to attract reluctant readers to literature.

According to Noël Carroll, author of *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), horror literature first appeared in the eighteenth century in the form of English Gothic novels (4). Since then, it has expanded to other media, perhaps most notable the horror movie genre (Carroll 7). Ken Gelder states, in *The Horror Reader* (2000), that the horror genre is a cultural production that has great socio-cultural effects, helping us define such diffuse subjects as the definition of evil (1). At the same time, Gelder also acknowledges that the horror genre has often been perceived as illegitimate since it includes narratives that are “shocking, spectacular, sensationalist and ‘immoral’ (or amoral) . . .” (5). As such, it proves to be a very complex genre of literature, since it both has impact on today’s society, whilst at the same time facing criticism and questioning when it comes to the genre’s legitimacy as a genre worthy of academic study.

While this may show that the horror genre is a quite modern genre, that has potential to impact the society we live in, it does not really specify what it consists of. Sharon A. Russell attempts to define the horror genre in *Stephen King: A Critical Companion* (1996). According to Russell, there are several aspects that are often featured in the horror genre. First of all is the presence of monsters such as Dracula or the wolfman, yet all horror novels do not deal with monsters. Literature within the field is also often built around suspense, which is increased since the reader often knows more than the characters of the novel (17). As readers, we know that something is lurking in the dark, that the characters unknowingly go to investigate. Furthermore, different types of settings and themes are often recurring in horror fiction, such as “old houses, abandoned castles, damp cellars, or dark forests . . .”, the struggle between good
and evil and the dangers accompanied by too much knowledge etc. (Russell 17-18). 

Finally, Russell discusses the origins of the genre itself, the Gothic novel and how modern horror differentiates itself from its origin. The Gothic generally deals with threats from outside of the character and it often “reflects concerns about advances in knowledge and whether they will be good or bad for society” (Russell 19). In modern horror, threats from inside the character have become more common, whilst the concern for how too much knowledge can affect the world remains (Russell 19). Many of these features may not be exclusive to the horror genre, perhaps it is more the combination of some or all of these that defines horror fiction as its own genre.

The novels studied in this essay are Pet Sematary and The Shining, both written by Stephen King. There are several reasons for why these novels have been chosen for this essay. First of all, Stephen King is one of the major authors in the horror genre, and has been credited to be one of the writers who brought the horror genre into mainstream literature during the 1970’s (Carroll 2). Since then King has published over 50 novels (“The Library”). Many of these novels can be considered to belong to the horror genre. The novels chosen for this essay are two very prominent works in King’s bibliography. Both novels were made into movie adaptions and while the novel The Shining gained fame through Stanley Kubrick’s rendition of the story, Pet Sematary stands out as King himself believes it to be the “most frightening book I’ve ever written” (Sematary XI). As these novels are such iconic works by a very successful writer of horror fiction, they appear to be suitable for this essay through their function of representatives of the genre.

Secondly, Pet Sematary and The Shining feature many similarities between the characters and their relationships. Both novels are centered around a family, the Creed’s and the Torrance’s. In both cases, the family consists of a mother, father and a child around the age five to six. Pet Sematary also features a second child, the baby Gage. Furthermore, the fathers, Louis Creed and Jack Torrance, while seemingly very
different in the start of the novel, both evolve into becoming somewhat of the antagonists as the stories progress. While the stories’ main protagonists may be argued to be the fathers, the mothers and oldest children play major roles in both novels. This allows the reader to experience empathy, not only towards the fathers, but also for the other characters that forms the families. These characters can then be discussed in terms of easy and difficult empathy. Both novels also contain a feature which allows a further depth to the empathy analysis of the child characters. Both Ellie and Danny possess some kind of supernatural powers. While Danny’s powers are shown very overtly in the novel, as he literary has “the shining”, Ellie appears to be somewhat clairvoyant as her dreams show her events taking place whilst she is asleep. This puts the characters in a peculiar situation when it comes to the question of them as victims, which allows for a further depth in the analysis of the empathy they invoke in the reader. Through this perspective, it will become possible to show how horror literature, a genre with the prime focus to scare the reader, can be used in the EFL classroom with the purpose of training students’ empathy and engaging reluctant readers.

By analyzing Pet Sematary and The Shining through cognitive literary criticism with focus on empathy, this essay argues that child characters in the novels Pet Sematary and The Shining become victims and experience negative emotions, to the evil in the novels, and by doing so, invoke easy empathy. Their supernatural powers give them further possibilities to be harmed by, but also act against, the evil forces of the novels. The mothers in the novels also invoke easy empathy and may be seen as victims who to some degree stand up to the horrors. The fathers invoke a more complex empathy, both easy and difficult as they progress towards a more antagonistic role in the novels. Since these two novels invoke both easy and difficult empathy, the readers can train their ability to empathize, and using them in the EFL classroom may help reluctant readers find reading engaging, perhaps for the first time.
2 Theory of empathy

The study is a comparative analysis of a qualitative nature. Cognitive literary criticism, with its theories on empathy forms the theoretical framework to what different kinds of empathy characters in horror literature can invoke in a reader. While cognitive literary criticism consists of multiple subfields and interdisciplinary pursuits, such as theory of mind etc., the focus of the present study is limited to empathy as an effect of reading. The source material consists of Stephen King’s *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* which has been analyzed using close reading with focus on scenes in which the characters may invoke empathy in the reader. In the forthcoming analysis, the families of the novels are analyzed, starting with the child characters. After that follows an analysis of the mothers and finally the fathers. Six characters in all are analyzed, and because of this, only certain key scenes related to the subject have been included, even though there may be more material on some characters, such as Louis who is the protagonist of *Pet Sematary*. The youngest child in *Pet Sematary*, Gage, has been excluded from the analysis since he is a minor character who is either a toddler, dead or resurrected and possibly possessed by an evil spirit through a large part of the novel.

The study also includes a pedagogical perspective which discusses the benefits of novels that includes both easy and difficult empathy as well as reluctant readers and how horror literature can act as an incentive for such students to become more engaged in the reading.

2.1 Definition of the term “Empathy”

As previously mentioned, this essay uses cognitive literary criticism with a focus on empathy to analyze the characters in the novels and discuss how, and what
different types of empathy they invoke. The main focus will be on easy and difficult empathy, and how the different characters offer either, or both, to the reader. Before delving into the subject of easy and difficult empathy however, the concept of empathy itself needs further clarification. To begin with, Keen defines empathy as a “vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect . . .” (4). Furthermore, empathy “can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading” (4). This sharing of feelings does not have to be a conscious response, rather it appears to be an automated system in the human brain (Keen 4). Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer offers a similar definition of the term, but with an extra layer “empathy is both understanding of other people’s point of view and recognition of one’s own intuitive and emotional reaction” (127). According to Kümmerling-Meibauer, empathy is not just a sharing of affect as Keen states, but also an internal mental process of one’s own reaction. This essay relies on a combination of these two definitions, where empathy is seen as something that is an unconscious reaction of sharing someone else’s feelings and point of view, but also the recognition of the emotional reaction oneself experiences.

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish empathy from sympathy since the two concepts are very closely related. Keen offers a simple distinction between the two, and claims that empathy means feeling someone else’s pain, while sympathy is feeling a supportive emotion, or in other words, pity for someone else’s pain (5). Kümmerling-Meibauer expands on the difference slightly, and states that with empathy, one is “able to empathize with other people’s emotional conditions, even if these respective people are regarded as unfriendly or unappealing” (128). Empathy can in other words be felt, even though one might dislike the person, whereas sympathy is mainly experienced when one feels sorry for someone. Because of this, empathy is perhaps more suitable in the EFL-classroom as it can teach students to feel with different kinds of emotions, not
only with someone else’s pain, and also relate and understand people who are different to themselves. Furthermore, none of the above authors define the distinction between sympathy and pity, and Keen appears to use the two terms as near interchangeable (Keen 5). In this essay however, pity is understood as a slightly more negative term, which relies more on uneven power relations between the one feeling pity and the one being pitied. As such, pity is a less favorable outcome than sympathy, with empathy being the preferred one.

2.2 Why readers create empathetic bonds with characters

Keen offers several different hypotheses to why a reader creates an empathetic bond with fictional characters, this essay will take two of these hypotheses into consideration when analyzing the novels. Keen’s first hypothesis is highly relevant to this essay. Keen states that “empathy for fictional characters may require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization” (69). Since the characters analyzed in this essay are fictional children and their parents, it is possible that the reader will have limited possibilities of identifying with the characters of the novel. Perhaps even more so since the characters inhabit supernatural powers, become possessed by an evil hotel etc. While teenagers of upper secondary school, which is the group of readers that this essay is concerned with, can remember their childhood, they are no longer children. Some form of identification can still be reached, perhaps in form of nostalgia or old memories brought back to the surface, but having telepathic communication with people miles and miles away or resurrecting a family pet might be harder to identify with. When it comes to the adult characters of the novels, who in this case are parents, it may also be hard for students to identify with the characters as most teenage students are not parents themselves. However, as Keen states, identification does not necessarily affect empathy.
Keen’s first hypothesis explains why it is possible to create an empathetic bond with the adult and child-characters in these horror stories, but not why it happens so easily in horrors novels.

The fourth hypothesis that Keen presents provides a better explanation for this question. The author claims that “empathetic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative feeling states, whether or not a match in details of experience exists” (Keen 72). Furthermore, readers seem to remember more occasions when they have experienced empathy towards a fictional character when dealing with negative feelings, rather than positive, even though it is possible to feel empathy for positive feelings (Keen 72). As the horror genre aims to instill fear in the reader, the characters often have to face different horrors causing them clear negative feelings. The characters do not only face emotions of fear and horror, but also feelings of loss, hopelessness, despair and more.

This can be connected to the research by Maria Nikolajeva, who in the article “Did You Feel as If You Hated People?” (2013), claims that readers can more easily recognize basic emotions such as fear, joy, distress etc. These are our more primitive emotions, and are innate in every human. It is also possible to empathize with these basic emotions even though the reader may not have experienced them to the same degree as the character (“Did you feel” 97-98). Since such emotions are very present in horror novels, perhaps mostly through fear and distress, it appears to be a very suitable genre to instill empathy in its readers. Nikolajeva also states that these emotions can be shown either by “showing” or “telling” (“Did you feel” 98). “Telling”, also called meta-representation, is simply telling the reader what emotions a character is experiencing, for example stating that the character is angry etc. While it is possible for readers to empathize with emotions that are only being “told”, Nikolajeva claims that emotions that are “shown” to the reader are easier to engage and empathize with:
As emotions are, unlike language, non-linear, unstructured, and diffuse, language is an inadequate medium to represent them. “Telling,” or meta-representation, that is, putting a simple label on an emotional state, is less engaging than “showing,” which can be achieved by a wide register of narrative means available to fiction, including figurative language, characterization, and narrative perspective. (“Did you feel” 99)

Nikolajeva further discusses the difference between “showing” and “telling” in the book *Reading for learning: Cognitive approaches to children’s literature* (2014) and states that another issue with “telling”, is that it is possible to experience emotions to varying degrees (*Reading* 89). This is something that simple labels, or “telling” cannot portray. Nikolajeva claims that figurative language is more effective when it comes to “showing”, and that “Figurative language does not merely describe or explain an emotion . . . but evoke it through triggering an affective response. . .” (*Reading* 90). As horror novels deal with emotions such as fear and distress it is plausible that the reader is not merely “told” what emotions the characters are experiencing, but rather “shown”, perhaps through figurative language. This would mean that the reader possibly becomes more engaged with the emotions of the characters which can help them empathize with them.

 Finally, Keen states that readers more easily empathize with victims, and that “novels in which child characters are subjected to cruel or unfair treatment evoke empathy. . .” (69-70). Both of these aspects apply to the novels analyzed in this essay as all characters can be said to become victims to both horror, sorrow, and violence. The child-characters, Ellie in *Pet Sematary* and Danny in *The Shining* can also be said to be treated unfairly or cruelly. Both Ellie and Danny become even more exposed to the horrors in the novels through psychic or clairvoyant powers which could further add to the readers perceiving them as victims or being unfairly or cruelly treated. Keen offers
no definition of the term victim; however, the analysis of this essay relies heavily on the idea of victimization and how that affects the reader. This essay assumes a definition of the term as either someone who is harmed, injured, or killed as a result of an event or an action caused by another character, as well as someone who is unable to act, or is feeling helpless due to the actions of other characters or events. Finally, it is assumed that victimization relies heavily on uneven power relations.

2.3 Easy and difficult empathy

A final aspect of empathy that the forthcoming analysis relies on, is the subject of easy and difficult empathy. According to Eric Leake, easy empathy is a type of empathy that is quite effortless to achieve, and often is connected to victims of abuse or oppression. This is important since it helps readers relate to the characters and gain deeper understanding of themselves and their connection to the rest of the world (Leake 175). The characters of the novels that this essay deals with are often victimized and may therefore invoke easy empathy in the reader. This is of course something positive, however, “An easy empathy can actually make us complacent in that view, as we are reassured that we are the caring people we consider ourselves to be while we empathize with those who are suffering or in less advantageous situations.” (Leake 175) As such, it does not challenge us or our understanding of ourselves. Moreover, easy empathy relies on the reader’s “desire to empathize with that character because of the character’s likability or our sense of that character deserving our empathy” (Leake 177). This is problematic since it somehow is dependent on the empathizer acknowledging that someone deserves empathy, and therefore becomes very similar to pity. Leak also states that there are:

troubling power differences at work here, as empathy approaches pity, and as we might feel ennobled or elevated through empathizing with a victim. Such an
easy empathy is performed without risk of upsetting the positions or privileges of the empathizer, who is placed in a favorable position relative the empathize (177).

With this in mind, easy empathy clearly has both positive and negative sides, since it both helps the reader to create a connection with the characters, yet at the same time it does not challenge the reader or their view of themselves.

Difficult empathy is an empathy that “pushes the limits of our understanding in reaching out to those with whom we might not otherwise wish contact or association” (Leake 176). This concept relies heavily on the reader’s ability to create an empathic bond with characters whom the reader dislikes, which appears almost as a conscious act where the reader attempts to feel empathy towards a character. Furthermore, this type of empathy does not necessarily mean that the empathizer agrees with the actions of the empathizee (Leake 177). Instead, “a difficult empathy is one in which we attempt to reach out based upon our emotional experiences, our understanding of context and character, and our capacities of perception and identification in order to better understand and approximate the otherwise abhorrent feelings and actions of an inhumane character” (Leake 177). Keen touches upon this subject as well, when claiming that authors often times feel with all their characters, not only likeable protagonists. This shows that most characters possess some traits that are possible to empathize with, and which readers can discover even if they dislike the character. This turns novels into a space where a reader can explore perspectives which would otherwise be avoided (131). With this in mind, difficult empathy becomes valuable since:

If we only empathize with those who reassure us and confirm our sensitivities, then we will be unable to understand through empathy a wider range of human actions, many of which are in particular need of greater understanding and
address. Difficult empathy fosters the development of more expansive identities that incorporate the best and the worst of people (Leake 184). This proves the importance of difficult empathy as it allows us to open our minds to people of all kinds and beliefs and offer them understanding but not necessarily congruence.

3 Horror as motivation for reluctant readers

As this essay deals with how certain characters in horror literature functions as important emotional connections between the reader and the novel, it seems suitable to discuss how this knowledge can be used in order to motivate reluctant readers.

3.1 Reluctant readers

In the last decades, it has become apparent that people, and students, read less and less (Keen 109). At the same time, as Cheryl L. Wozniak states, the demands on students to be “critical literacy consumers in the 21st century have never been greater” (17). Much research has been done on the subject of reluctant readers and how to motivate them, with the focus on student’s earlier years in school and their first contact with reading. Wozniak’s “Reading and Talking about Books: A Critical Foundation for Intervention” (2011) and Jo Worthy’s “A Matter of interest: Literature that hooks reluctant readers and keeps them reading” (1996) are just a few examples of such research. The subject of studying reading and motivation among young children is of course very important, since it is in the early years of their education that the foundation of children’s’ literacy is built. However, that does not necessarily mean that once the children become teenagers, it is too late for them to create a positive relationship with literature.
While most of the research done on the subject of reluctant readers is catered towards younger children, some of it is still applicable to older students. According to Worthy, most students who struggle with reading have a learning difficulty and grow to see reading as the enemy as they continue to fail (205). With reluctant readers in upper secondary school, their view on reading is consequently most likely negative. Worthy also states that while some students who become reluctant readers suffer from difficulties such as dyslexia which makes reading more difficult, this is not true for every student who grows to dislike reading. Many students enjoy reading at an early age, but loses interest as they grow older. This often happens to students who dislike the typical texts used in schools. These students “never engage with reading at all, and many develop an aversion to reading that may be lifelong” (Worthy 206). Allowing students to read literature that they find interesting would then be one way to reach reluctant readers. Both previously mentioned Worthy and Wozniak point to the importance of allowing students to read popular, or high interest texts as a way of motivating students to read (Worthy 209-10; Wozniak 20). While it may not be suitable to allow students to always choose freely what literature to read, having their interests in consideration could prove important when it comes to changing students’ attitude to reading.

3.2 The attraction and pedagogical use of horror literature

The horror genre’s continued popularity is evident amongst teens, not only in literature, but perhaps even more so in other media such as movies, TV-shows and video games. Ljubica Matek argues for a use of horror literature in school in the article “Teaching Horror Literature in a Multicultural Classroom” (2015). According to Matek, horror fiction offers more than just engaging the reader, it is a type of literature that “gives the opportunity to ponder different, often taboo, issues of human existence, and
the intricacies of the human mind and desire as they are presented in literary texts” (64). Furthermore, Matek states that “the effect of the horrible and scary in literature is such that it may produce thoughts which have a strong emotional impact on the reader” (64). This emotional impact would then be possible for teachers to use in the classroom, as it can lead to discussions amongst the students. It is clear that horror literature has further use than just being engaging, but Matek offers only a short discussion about what it is that engages the reader when reading horror. A deeper look into what it is that attracts readers to horror can be seen in the so called “paradox of horror” (Carroll 158-68).

Carroll discusses the “paradox of horror” and states the question: “if horror necessarily has something repulsive about it, how can audiences be attracted to it?” (158). Even though horror causes the reader negative emotions of fear or disgust, many still enjoy it and seek it out in fiction. Carroll arrives at the conclusion that the attraction of horror is curiosity, a curiosity driven by the mysterious monster which allows the horror stories to: “engag[e] its audience by being involved in processes of disclosure, discovery, proof, explanation, hypothesis and confirmation” (182). However, Carroll’s conclusion has been met with some critique, as it only states that the discovery and explanation of the monster is enough to allow us to endure the negative emotions, yet the emotions remains undesirable (Bantinaki 384). It is possible that the curiosity is one part which makes horror stories enjoyable, but according to Katerina Bantinaki, it is the fear itself that attracts as it becomes a positive emotion (383). Encountering fear in horror fiction becomes beneficial to us as it allows us to learn how to cope with our fear whilst being in a safe environment which we can control. Furthermore, “horror-induced fear is invigorating and can be experienced as a reward, especially if one wants to break the emotional routine without risking one’s life . . .” (Bantinaki 390). This means that not only is the curiosity driving the reader, but the reader also finds enjoyment in the
fear. If this is the answer to the paradox of horror, it explains how horror literature can attract readers, and why it becomes an engaging read.

Moving back to the pedagogic use of horror, Del Nero and Jennifer Renner offer further benefits of Gothic literature in the classroom. Nero and Renner’s study reaches the conclusion that horror fiction, or in this case Gothic fiction, allows the students to discuss and reflect over provocative and controversial subjects (397). The study also shows that the students were able to “develop empathy for others and increase tolerance and appreciation for individual differences” (Nero and Renner 397). This, amongst other things, can be connected to the Swedish curriculum, that states that the Swedish school should “promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathize” (4). Furthermore, the Swedish school should work with: “The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people are the values that the education should represent and impart” and “encourage all students to discover their own uniqueness as individuals . . .” (Curriculum 4). In other words, this type of fiction can be very valuable to students in the EFL-classroom, as many of the different subjects, such as the equal value of all people, that we as teachers should discuss with our students can be present in horror, or Gothic fiction.

It becomes quite clear that horror literature can be used the classroom, as it is both beneficial for the students, and also deals with some of the subjects from the Swedish curriculum. However, it is not completely unproblematic to use horror literature in the classroom. As it is a genre that aims to emotionally impact the reader, it is important to choose horror novels that suit the classroom environment. Firstly, the novel should perhaps not be too gory or horrifying, as that might harm the students. Secondly, in the article “Don’t let a good scare frighten you: Choosing and using quality chillers to promote reading”, Patricia O. Richards et al. claim that the novel should also
offer something more than just an engaging read. The characters, the setting and themes should not just act as the backdrop for the horrifying part of the story (836). The pedagogical section of the forthcoming analysis in this essay will deal with why the horror genre can be used to attract reluctant readers to literature and what it has to offer to the EFL-classroom.

4 Empathy in *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining*

The following analysis will focus on the characters in the two novels and what kinds of empathy they can invoke in the reader. The first part focuses on the child characters, Ellie Creed and Danny Torrance, followed by the mothers Rachel and Wendy, and then finally the fathers Louis and Jack. Whether or not a reader finds characters likeable is very subjective, and it is possible for readers to identify with different characters, which consequently can affect whether they feel easy or difficult empathy. However, the analysis relies on the assumption, as clarified in the theory section, that certain aspects make characters easy or difficult to empathize with. By highlighting these aspects in the analysis, a conclusion can be reached where it is shown whether or not the characters have a high probability of being easy or difficult to empathize with.

4.1 Easy empathy in Ellie and Danny

Eileen, mostly called Ellie throughout the novel, is the daughter of the Creed family and one of the major characters in King’s *Pet Sematary*. She is the oldest of the two children, yet only five/six years old during the novel. One of the first scenes with Ellie is when the Creed family arrives at their new home in Ludlow. As the family inspects the house and yard, Ellie falls and she scrapes her knee (King *Sematary* 7-8).
Although it is a very minor injury, which both parents assume is made to appear worse due to Ellie’s exhaustion from the long journey from Chicago, it is a scene where the character shows clear, negative emotions. This scene allows the reader to empathize with the character, right from the start of the novel (Keen 72). Not only is the child physically hurt and scolded by her father, she is also very fatigued. As Ellie is almost instantly put in a situation of negative emotions, she becomes a character which is easy for the reader to empathize with. At the same time, there is a slight chance that the scene could make the reader dislike Ellie as she can be perceived as “needy” and childish. This is however not very likely, as she, throughout the rest of the novel acts quite independently and invokes clear feelings of love in her parents. Her actions appear to stem from viable reasons, and Louis, who is annoyed and on the verge of hitting her, could be seen as putting her in the role of the victim (Sematary 69-70). Keen states that child characters who are victimized and “subjected to cruel or unfair treatment evoke empathy. . .” (70). This would then further allow the scene to invoke empathy in the reader. This allows the reader to form a connection to the character from the very beginning of the novel.

Throughout the first part of Pet Sematary, Ellie is mostly portrayed as a good daughter and the opening scene may serve the purpose of making her a believable five-year-old, rather than a “needy” and spoiled child. Later in the novel, she even manages to inspire admiration in Louis, as he reflects over how she is “wary of giving too much of herself away” (King Sematary 43). Many of her more prominent appearances in the novel’s first half are connected to negative feelings and victimization. One such part is when Ellie faces the fact that her cat Church eventually will die. After having visited the pet cemetery with the neighbor Judd and the rest of the family, she begins to realize that Church will die one day (King Sematary 44). As Louis both tries to comfort her, yet also explain that death is natural and happens to everyone, Ellie is overcome with
sadness and anger: “‘I don’t want Church to be like all those dead pets!’ she burst out, suddenly tearful and furious. ‘I don’t want Church to ever be dead! He’s my cat!’” (King *Sematary* 46). She then continues to cry in Louis’ lap until she falls asleep (King *Sematary* 46). This scene shows Ellie as quite vulnerable. While she is not being mistreated or victimized, she is demonstrating clear negative emotions. Once again, this allows the reader to easily empathize with her.

The part where Ellie becomes a character who invokes easy empathy to an even larger extent, is after her brother’s death. She becomes very quiet, and carries around a picture of her and Gage (King *Sematary* 256-57). At first, she appears to be nearly catatonic, as she sits “silent and grave, with the picture of her and Gage in one hand” (King *Sematary* 257). She does not even complain when given medicine to help her sleep, even though she usually does (King *Sematary* 257). Finally, Ellie appears to be unwilling to accept that Gage is gone. Louis walks in on her sitting in Gage’s chair, which Ellie sees as a way of “keeping things ready” for when Gage comes back (King *Sematary* 279). “‘I’m going to wish really hard,’ Ellie said calmly, ‘and pray to God for Gage to come back.’” (King *Sematary* 278) Furthermore, Ellie appears to receive very little support from her parents, and is left to handle her grief alone, with some help from Judd (King *Sematary* 316). This allows the reader to even more easily empathize with Ellie, as she is not only grieving, and appears to struggle with it, she is also left unsupported and in a way mistreated. She does not receive the help she needs from her parents, and would have been more or less abandoned if it had not been for Judd. This means that she both experiences negative emotions, and is subjected to unfair or cruel treatment (Keen 69-70,72). However, while this makes Ellie extremely easy to empathize with, it also puts her in a position where the reader may very easily feel pity for her pain.
Danny Torrance, Ellie’s counterpart in *The Shining*, plays a bigger role in the novel, and can even be considered to be the protagonist of the plot. Danny’s first appearance is in the second chapter, which is focalized through his mother Wendy. Despite the fact that the chapter is narrated from Wendy’s point of view, the main focus of the chapter is Danny. It invites the reader to easily empathize with the character as he is portrayed as a quiet, lonely five-year-old who silently sits on the sidewalk, waiting for his father to come home. Throughout the chapter, Wendy contemplates on the family’s situation and how Danny has been affected by recent events. It is revealed that the family has recently moved to Colorado, to a “bad” neighborhood in Boulder and that Danny’s father has lost his previous work at a University after hurting a student (King *Shining* 11-15). The reader also learns that Jack, Danny’s father, has previously broken Danny’s arm. This can be seen as a foreshadowing of Jack’s violent future. It can easily be connected to Keen’s hypotheses as it both shows that Danny is experiencing negative emotions, such as loneliness, and that he has been physically abused by his father (69-70,72). Much like in the case with Ellie, this first encounter with Danny is then highly likely to invoke feelings of empathy within the reader. However, while Ellie’s first scene also portrays the character as happy and with a supportive family, Danny situation is appearing dire through Wendy’s worry for his future:

> She went back to him and kissed him, rumpled his light-colored hair that was just losing its baby-fineness. He was such a solemn little boy, and sometimes she wondered just how he was supposed to survive with her and Jack as parents. The high hopes they had begun with came down to this unpleasant apartment building in a city they didn’t know. (King *Shining* 14)

It is abundantly clear that Danny invokes Leake’s easy empathy since Danny is portrayed as a character that the reader should feel empathy with (175). However, the
reader’s first encounter with the young boy can perhaps easily result in sympathy, rather than empathy. As such, the reader “might feel ennobled or elevated through empathizing with a victim” (Leake 177). This puts Danny, in the novel’s beginning, in a slightly more ambiguous situation than Ellie when it comes to the connection between reader and character and whether or not the reader feels sympathy or empathy.

4.1.1 Supernatural powers and empathy

As mentioned earlier, Ellie appears to possess some sort of supernatural abilities. This may sound like something that would make it hard to empathize with Ellie since the supernatural is a part of the fictional world, and could seem to create a dissonance with the otherwise realistic character. The result, however, may be the opposite. First of all, Keen states that “only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling. . .” is required for empathy (69). This means that even if the reader is unable to relate to the supernatural part, it is not impossible for the reader to feel empathy with the character. Secondly, it may not be the supernatural part that the reader can empathize with, but rather the negative emotions that Ellie experiences as a consequence of having the powers. This is true for Danny as well. Thirdly, unlike Danny, Ellie does not perceive her powers as supernatural, and neither do the people around her. To Ellie, her powers are simply nightmares and feelings of unease.

The first instance where Ellie displays these seemingly supernatural powers is after her cat has been resurrected at the ancient burial site, whilst Ellie, her brother and mother was in Chicago (King Sematary 188-89). “‘Daddy, how’s Church?’ Ellie asked as he set her down. It was a question Louis had expected, but not Ellie’s suddenly anxious face, and the deep worry-line that appeared between her dark blue eyes.” (King Sematary 188) Apparently, Ellie had had a nightmare the previous night where Church had been run over by a car (King Sematary 188). Louis lies and tells Ellie that the cat is
fine, and Ellie believes him, “‘Oh’, Ellie said, and that furrow between her eyes smoothed out. ‘Oh, that’s good. When I had that dream, I was sure he was dead’” (King 189). The passage shows the reader that not only does Ellie have dreams of things that happen in the real world, but she also believes her dreams to be true. In the scene, the character also shows her emotions through facial expressions. As Nikolajeva states, this makes it easier for the reader to become engaged with the character (“Did you feel” 99). This could mean that the reader also more easily can connect and empathize with Ellie.

A similar scene takes place as Louis is luring his family away to Chicago so that he can resurrect Gage:

‘I don’t want to go’ she said again, but so low only Louis could really hear over the shuffle and murmur of the boarding passengers. ‘I don’t want Mommy to go, either.’

‘Ellie, come on,’ Louis said. ‘You’ll be fine.’

‘I’ll be fine.’ She said, ‘but what about you? Daddy, what about you?’

(King Sematary 343)

Ellie appears to be worried to leave her father alone, seemingly sensing that he is about to do something that will harm him and possibly others. During her flight to Chicago, Ellie wakes up screaming from a nightmare, believing Gage to be alive and armed with a knife (King Sematary 350). Once the plane arrives, Ellie appears to be shook to her core by fear and at one point, she falls over and just remains lying there: “Going into the terminal, Ellie tripped over her own feet and fell down. She did not get up; merely lay there on the carpet with people passing around her . . . until Rachel picked her up in her arms” (King Sematary 351). This example also accentuates just how the reader is “shown” Ellie’s negative emotions state, instead of being told that she is scared, which would lead them to becoming more engaged (Nikolajeva “Did you feel” 99).
In these scenes, it is apparent that Ellie’s supernatural abilities bring her intense negative emotions. It also makes her a victim of some otherworldly power, using her to deliver a message and Ellie can do little to resist. Through all this, Ellie should become a character with whom the reader may easily empathize with. However, Leake states that easy empathy is problematic since it is dependent on the power relation between the empathizer and the one receiving the empathy (177). This is never challenged in the novel, and Ellie clearly remains a character with whom the reader is supposed to empathize with.

In the analysis of Ellie, it was stated that she often depicts negative emotions, but that she is also seen as a mostly happy child. This is not the case with Danny who in very few scenes portrays positive feelings. Instead, most of the scenes focus on how Danny deals with his ability to sense the evil in the hotel, or worry about his parents’ health, well-being or relationship. This is a result of his supernatural abilities, his “shining”, which does not only allow him to read his parents’ thoughts, but also to see the evil of the Overlook Hotel. As it is such a large part of Danny’s character, it is impossible to analyze the empathy that the young boy can invoke in the reader without taking that into account.

One scene which shows how Danny’s supernatural abilities haunts him, even in instances when his parents are finding something enjoyable, is when the family arrives at the Overlook Hotel, and stops to take in the sights (King Shining 63-64). Wendy's breath is taken away at the sight of the hotel placed in the Rocky Mountains. Danny, who also gazes at the hotel, has a much less pleasant experience and his reaction frightens his parents: “He was holding onto the guardrail and looking up at the hotel, his face a pasty gray color. His eyes had the blank look of someone on the verge of fainting” (King Shining 64). Danny reacts like this, not because he is amazed by the view, but rather because he realizes that the hotel has appeared in his nightmares, and
that he has been given warnings by his imaginary friend Tony not to go there: “It was
the place he had seen in the midst of blizzard, the dark and booming place where some
hideously familiar sought him down long corridors carpeted with jungle. The place that
Tony had warned him against. It was here. It was here. Whatever Redrum was, it was
here” (King Shining 64). In this scene, Danny’s supernatural power, and the
foreshadowing he is given through them, causes him to experience fear to such an
extent that he appears to be on the verge of fainting.

The beforementioned scene is interesting to analyze when it comes to the
empathy the character can invoke in the reader, and how his supernatural abilities affect
this as well. First of all, Danny is clearly experiencing negative emotions, the basic
emotion fear. This correlates with Nikolajeva’s theory, which claims that basic
emotions such as fear are easier to recognize, even if the empathizer has not
experienced the emotion to the same degree (“Did you feel” 97). Secondly, in the
quote, it is never stated that Danny is afraid, instead, his reactions show his emotions,
which can help the reader to become engaged with the character (Nikolajeva “Did you
feel” 98). Thirdly, the scene, while being far from the most horrifying experiences
Danny endures during his stay at the Overlook Hotel, indicates how his abilities become
a burden for him. While the other characters are enjoying themselves, he is reminded of
his nightmares. Furthermore, Danny constantly tries to hide this from his parents, so
that they will not worry about him. This can be seen in the previously mentioned
sequence where Danny tries to explain his reaction by stating that he got the sun in his
eyes (King Shining 64). Finally, it becomes clear that his abilities allow him to see
things that he is too young to understand. Since Danny is only five years old, he cannot
read, yet he is able to gain some brief understanding of the words that Tony shows him
(King Shining 32). The boy is unable to understand the word “Redrum”, which is later
revealed to be the mirrored image of the word murder, but knows at the same time that
it means something dangerous. As such Danny experiences different kinds of negative emotions such as guilt, feelings of powerlessness etc.

In contrast to Ellie who also experiences nightmares, Danny knows that the things Tony shows him are more than just dreams or his imagination. Previously in the novel, Danny contemplates on the time when Tony showed him where his father had left his bag, somewhere where Danny had never been before. When he told Jack to look in the cellar, the bag was there (King *Shining* 29). Danny can then be seen as a victim to his abilities, which show him things that both scare him, and that he has only limited possibilities to change. Since this is recurring throughout the novel, Danny can be a character who the reader can very easily empathize with since he is victimized and experiences negative emotions of many different kinds (Keen 70,72). The young boy also carries the burden of his knowledge mostly by himself. Danny invokes easy empathy as defined by Leake (175, 177). Due to his very few instances of relief from these negative emotions or victimization in the first part of the novel, it is possible that Danny may invoke pity, rather than empathy.

However, Danny's abilities can also act to his empowerment. While the knowledge of the evil nature of the hotel and its desire to kill Danny and his mother causes him negative emotions, it at the same time makes him the character that possesses the power to save his family. Furthermore, Danny's psychic abilities are very powerful, which is why the Hotel wants to consume him, but it is also what gives Danny the means to fight the evil. First of all, the character is the only one able to contact the outside world after the hotel has been snowed in. Danny does this by contacting the hotel chef, Halloran, who is on a vacation in Florida (King *Shining* 311-12). Halloran also has “the shine” and acts as a mentor to Danny (King *Shining* 80-89). By contacting Halloran, Danny is able to invoke hope in the reader that he and his
mother can be saved. His powers also allow Danny to figure out the detail that his possessed/insane father has forgotten and which leads to the destruction and death of Jack and the hotel (King *Shining* 429). This could possibly alter the uneven power relations between the reader and Danny as they possess a similar level of knowledge, unlike the other characters of the novel. The character also breaks somewhat from his victimized role. While this may not change the fact that Danny invokes easy empathy, perhaps it could lead to the reader feeling less inclined to pity him (Leake 177).

Finally, it is Danny who is the only one who manages, for a brief moment, to break through to his father Jack once he has been possessed by the evil within the hotel (King *Shining* 428-429). As such, in the latter half of the novel, Danny and the empathy which he can invoke becomes the opposite of Ellie. While Ellie becomes extremely easy to empathize with or perhaps even pity, towards the end of the novel, Danny does the reversed as he appears to become empowered. Danny never invokes what Leake calls difficult empathy (177), but his position as a victim becomes less obvious as he manages to offer some resistance towards the evil of the hotel. This may affect the reader in such a manner that the reader feels sympathy or pity for Danny in the first half of the novel, but empathy as he is empowered in the latter half.

4.2 The mothers of *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining*

The mothers in both novels, Rachel in *Pet Sematary* and Wendy in *The Shining*, share some similarities but they are also quite different. Rachel is more of a supportive character, with only a few chapters focalized through her point of view towards the end of the novel, while Wendy is one of the main characters with several chapters focused on her perspective.
Rachel Creed, much like the previously analyzed characters, has potential to invoke easy empathy in the reader. Danny and Ellie have all been stated to invoke easy empathy due to the fact that they experience negative emotions and become victims, this is true for Rachel as well. However, in contrast to Wendy, Rachel experiences both negative and positive emotions throughout the novel. The character does however possess one certain aspect which is particularly interesting for this analysis since it, in the first part of the novel, appears to be more or less the sole reason Rachel experiences negative emotions.

This aspect is Rachel’s fear of death. Her anxiety towards death comes from a childhood trauma, when her older sister Zelda suffered from spinal meningitis and eventually died (King *Sematary* 223). This event appears to have traumatized Rachel to such an extent that the subject of death causes her immense distress. During the first part of the novel, before Gage’s death, this appears to be the one source which causes Rachel to feel negative emotions. One of the first instances in which this side of the character is revealed to the reader is during the family’s visit to the Pet Sematary. While Ellie finds the cemetery both exciting and beautiful, Louis realizes that Rachel does not share her daughter’s admiration of the site: “She was standing by herself, outside the outermost circle, looking more uncomfortable than ever. Louis thought: *Even here she’s upset. She never had been easy around the appearances of death . . .*” (King *Sematary* 37) If this quote is analyzed with Nikolajeva’s “telling” and “showing” in mind, it appears to be more of a “telling” nature (“Did you feel” 98-99). The reader is told that she is uncomfortable, and Louis sees that she is upset. Yet it becomes quite effective, as it contrasts Ellie’s reaction. As such, the scene still remains quite relevant when it comes to the empathy that the character invokes in the reader. The scene may also serve as a foreshadowing to later events where the subject of death causes an argument to
ensue between Louis and Rachel (King *Sematary* 49-53). This is one aspect of Rachel that assists the reader in feeling empathy towards the character.

Like most characters in *Pet Sematary*, the event of Gage’s death turns Rachel into a character that becomes very easy to empathize with. Rachel’s reaction to Gage’s death manifests as overwhelming grief which makes her cry endlessly, unless Louis or someone else gives her medications to calm her down (King *Sematary* 317). This clearly makes Rachel a character whom the reader can easily empathize with as she is experiencing negative emotions to such an extent that only drugs can ease her suffering. Even though the reader may not have experienced grief to the same degree, it is still likely that they will empathize with the character (Keen 72). However, it also turns her into a very passive character since the drugs keep her from experiencing her emotions. Additionally, Rachel never challenges her role as a victim to the same extent as her counterpart in *The Shining*. While she does become more active as she travels from Chicago to Ludlow in order to save her husband, who she fears is about to take his own life, she eventually fails to challenge her victimization. Upon seeing Gage’s resurrected body, she is overcome with joy and rushes to embrace the child. Rachel is then killed by Gage with his father’s scalpel (King *Sematary* 439). As such, she is deceived by her now evil son. This means that she remains a victim, which potentially acts in her favor when it comes to empathy. It can however also lead to pity, as Rachel never learns the truth of what has happened to her son, something that the reader already knows. The character’s role as a victim and the uneven power relations between reader and character remains to a large extent unchanged. This could possibly lead to easy empathy, but perhaps also pity (Leake 177).

As previously mentioned, Wendy's first appearance in the novel is in the second chapter which features herself and her son Danny (King *Shining* 11-15). While the main
focus of the chapter is her worry for Danny, it is still a chapter where the reader can empathize with her due to the clear portrayal of negative emotions (Keen 72). In the first part of the novel, Wendy is portrayed as a character who is often worried, either about her son, her husband or even things like the risk of their car breaking down during their travel to the Overlook hotel (King *Shining* 61). She also expresses feelings of being an inadequate mother and appears to have been caused great pain by her husband’s previous drinking problem (King *Shining* 47, 50). As such, when it comes to the empathy that Wendy may invoke, the character, much like her son Danny, becomes a character with whom the reader can easily empathize with, since both constantly portray negative emotions and signs of victimization.

There are however instances in which Wendy displays characteristics that could challenge the easy empathy to some degree. One of these is when the family has arrived at the Overlook hotel and is given the tour of the hotel. Wendy then realizes that she is somewhat jealous of the connection that her son and father have:

> With the two of them around, she sometimes felt like an outsider, a bit player who had accidentally wandered back onstage while the main action was taking place. Well, they wouldn't be able to exclude her this winter, her two exasperating males; quarters were a little too close for that. She suddenly realized she was feeling jealous of the closeness between her husband and her son, and felt ashamed. (King *Shining* 90)

Such selfish characteristics are more associated with difficult empathy, as it can lead to the reader disliking the character (Leake 177). Even though the reader is only “told” Wendy’s feelings in this quote, her jealousy is easy to understand, but not necessarily to what extent she experiences these emotions (Nikolajeva *Reading* 89). It should be mentioned that Wendy has very few of these scenes where she shows emotions or
actions which could cause the reader to dislike certain aspects of the character and as such, remains a character with whom the reader can easily empathize with. The fact that Wendy appear to have some flaws could perhaps even add to the readers ability to empathize with the character as she may become more nuanced and realistic.

During the latter parts of the novel, Wendy does however become less of a victim by standing up to the horrors of the hotel. This may not change the fact that the character is easily empathized with, but it might lead to the reader being less inclined to feel pity towards her. Whilst horrified by the haunted hotel and her husband, she still takes actions to ensure the safety of her son. As such, even though Wendy experiences negative feelings, she is no longer as much of a victim. One such scene, in which Wendy challenges her position as a victim, is during her struggle with her husband. This struggle takes place in the lobby of the hotel, which Wendy visits to make sure that Jack, who they managed to lock in the kitchen cupboard earlier, is still locked in. However, the hotel has by then awoken, and helped Jack escape his captivity. A fight ensues between Jack and Wendy in the lobby. Despite receiving several blows from Jack's mallet, Wendy manages to fight back and wound both Jack and the hotel:

“Oh dear God!” she screamed to the Overlook's shadowy lobby, and buried the kitchen knife in his lower back up to the handle.

He stiffened beneath her and then shrieked. She thought she had never heard such an awful sound in her whole life; it was as if the very boards and windows and doors of the hotel had screamed. (King *Shining* 397)

Even though the scene ends with Wendy being chased by Jack, it is still significant when it comes to the empathy that Wendy can invoke in the reader because it shows how Wendy challenges her role as a victim. She also becomes the only character in the novel that is capable of causing physical harm to Jack/the Overlook hotel, unlike
Hallorann who is immediately knocked unconscious by Jack (King *Shining* 416). There is still no doubt that Wendy invokes an easy empathy during her struggle with Jack, as she clearly is the character that the reader should empathize with (Leake 177). The character is however no longer as much of a victim. Furthermore, she no longer allows her fear to control her, like previously in the novel, but rather faces her fears in an attempt to ensure her son's survival. As such, she can be seen as something of a self-sacrificing hero. This could mean that it is less likely that the reader now feels pity towards Wendy. When Jack swings his mallet and breaks her ribs, the reader is no longer as inclined to feel sorry for her, but instead empathize with her pain and horror as she fights for her and her son's lives (King *Shining* 396-97).

A final aspect which will be discussed in the analysis of the mothers in *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining*, is the portrayal of the mothers as nuanced characters. Both Rachel and Wendy depict some negative sides that could lead to the reader feeling some discontent with the character’s actions. However, as Leake states, a person can feel empathy towards someone even though they do not agree with their actions (177). While it is not likely that these characteristics will change the reader’s view of the characters to a negative one and thus require the reader to “reach out” in order to empathize with them, it does show that the adult characters appear more nuanced, and maybe more realistic than their children.

Firstly, Wendy, as previously mentioned, does now and again appear to be jealous of her husband’s and son’s close relationship. She feels left out or upset that Danny appears to love his father more even though he has some abusive sides. Secondly, the character is often portrayed as a worried mother. While not very likely, it is possible that the reader may associate Wendy’s actions and constant worry in the first part of the novel with a stereotypical, fragile woman/mother. These factors may cause
the reader to find Wendy as less of a likeable character, and therefore require more of a reach in order to empathize with her. Rachel can also be read in a manner which makes the question of what empathy she invokes less evident. Her fear of death is what brings her to experience negative emotions. It is however also the part of her character which leads to conflicts with Louis. Her fear of death, and her desire to keep that subject out of her own and her family’s life, escalates an argument with Louis to a degree that the reader may find difficult to relate to (King *Sematary* 48-53). This, of course, does not mean that the reader cannot recognize her emotions or feel empathy (Nikolajeva “Did you feel” 99). It simply shows that while Danny and Ellie appear to lack any flaws that the reader may dislike and therefore make it harder for them to empathize with, the adults are more nuanced and offers perhaps a wider range of characteristics. As previously mentioned, these flaws could also possibly act in favor for easy empathy since it can help the reader to identify with the character. It is possible that the reader may be able to relate to some of these negative sides, such as Wendy’s jealousy or worry, which can make the characters more realistic and easier to identify with.

4.3 Complicated fathers

Louis is the main character of *Pet Sematary*, and the father of the Creed family. In the beginning of the novel he is presented as a loving father and husband, with very few flaws. He is not perfect though. In the novel’s first chapter, where the Creed family arrives at their new home in Ludlow Maine, it is revealed that Louis had, for a moment during their long journey from Chicago, fantasized about abandoning his wife and two children (King 4). Despite this, he appears to be happy and the fantasy of escaping his family seems to stem from his fatigue rather than a disliking of his family. As soon as they arrive, and he sees the rest of the family’s joy he quickly abandons all thoughts of running away (King *Sematary* 5). As the Creed family walks up to the house, their
daughter Ellie falls and scrapes her knee which Louis then wants to clean. This causes Ellie to cry even more, which irritates Louis to a point that he wants to slap her (King *Sematary* 8). Louis’ reaction can most likely be explained by his exhaustion from the long journey, since it is the first and only time Louis acts in such a way, but it does damage his appearance as the perfect father. During this section, the reader can understand Louis’ feelings of fatigue and irritation yet perhaps not agree with his impulse of striking Ellie. This could mean that Louis, already in the first scene, has some potential to invoke difficult empathy as the reader may feel empathy with Louis, yet disagree with his actions (Leake 177).

However, since *Pet Sematary* is a horror novel, and Louis is the main character, it is not surprising for the reader when the novel delves into darker themes in which Louis can be seen as a victim, or at least experience negative emotions that help the reader to empathize with the character. The inciting incident of the plot occurs during the first day of the semester at the University where Louis works. The student Victor Pascal is carried into the infirmary after being hit by a car. After just a brief look, Louis realizes that the young man is going to die (King *Sematary* 69). What follows is a quite gruesome scene, describing both the state of the young boy, Louis’ thoughts as he struggles to save the man’s life and the reactions of the people witnessing the scene (King *Sematary* 69-74). This scene may not appear to put Louis in the role of a victim but rather the hero. He is attempting to save Victor’s life, whilst also ordering his staff around and trying to take control of the situation. However, as Victor’s life is fading, he speaks to Louis about the pet cemetery that Louis and his family had visited earlier. “‘it’s not the real Sematary...’ The eyes were vacant, not seeing, rimmed with blood: the mouth grinning the large grin of a dead carp” (King *Sematary* 73). This frightens Louis and puts him in a clear state of negative emotions: “Horror rolled through Louis, gripping his warm heart in its cold hands, squeezing. It reduced him, made him less and
less, until he felt like taking to his heels and running from this twisted, speaking head on the floor of the infirmary waiting room” (King *Semtary* 73). In this section, the emotions Louis is experiencing are clearly “shown”. The figurative language used to describe how the fear he experiences is “gripping his warm heart in its cold hands” etc. could possibly help the reader to engage and connect to his fear (King *Semtary* 73; Nikolajeva “Did you feel” 98) This event stays with Louis throughout most of the novel, and Pascal returns several times to haunt his dreams.

The death of Pascal is the event that sets Louis’ change into a victim in motion. The haunting nightmares invoke horror in him, putting him in a clear state of negative emotions. This would make Louis into a character that the reader can more easily empathize with, according to Keen’s fourth hypothesis. Furthermore, characters dealing with negative emotions are more memorable (72). This could mean that readers will more easily remember Louis as a character, and perhaps become more attached to him. The way King chooses to time and time again “show” the reader the negative emotions, like in the previous quotation, could further help the reader to become engaged in the character (Nikolajeva “Did you feel” 98). However, the main peripeteia of the novel, which turns Louis into a victim and later on the antagonist, is the death of his young son Gage.

Gage’s death happens quite late in the novel, more than halfway through, and follows after the chapter dealing with a heartwarming interaction between Louis and his son on the day described as the last day that Louis was really happy (King *Semtary* 244). The scene itself is never included in the novel, other than through fragments of flashbacks as Louis goes over it again and again: “It was quick, Missy-my-dear, one minute he was there in the road and the next minute he was lying in it, but way down by the Ringers’ house. It hit him and killed him and then it dragged him and you better believe it was quick.” (King *Semtary* 265) It becomes clear to the reader that Gage had
run out into the road and been hit by a truck. Louis had been on the brink of being able to save his son, but was not fast enough: “He saw his fingers. Louis saw his fingers. He saw his fingers lightly skating over the back of Gage’s jacket. Then Gage’s jacket had been gone. Then Gage had been gone.” (King Sematary 271) This event turns Louis into a victim, as he feels overwhelming grief and is unable to cope with his son’s death. He is no longer the hero, taking control of the situation and caring for the wellbeing of others. This, according to the theories of both Keen and Leake, should make Louis into a character who invoke easy empathy in the reader (Keen 72; Leake 177).

As Louis is haunted by his grief, his actions may however eventually lead to the character invoking difficult empathy instead of easy. Louis knows that it is possible to resurrect Gage, but he also knows that those who are brought back to life become different, or even evil (King Sematary 322-23). In Louis’ first encounter with the graveyard, he buried Ellie’s cat Church (King Sematary 145-48). When Church comes back, seemingly alive, Louis is almost instantly disgusted by the cat: “The feel of the cat caused Louis to break out in gooseflesh, and he had to clench his teeth grimly to keep from kicking it away. Its furry sides felt somehow too slick, too thick – in a word, loathsome.” (King Sematary 163) The entire family quickly starts to dislike Church to such an extent that they avoid contact with the cat (King Sematary 203-04). Despite his knowledge of Church’s change, and the horror stories he had been told about people who had been brought back, Louis still decides to bring his son back to life (King Sematary 322-25). The turning point comes when Louis visits his son’s grave after the funeral. At the grave Louis argues with himself, but finally decides to resurrect his son, even though he is aware of the fact that Gage may return changed, certain that he and Rachel would still be able to love Gage:

Did he believe it would be impossible for him to love Gage even if Gage had to go on wearing diapers until he was eight? If he did not master the first primer
until he was twelve? If he never mastered it at all? Could he simply dismiss his son as a... a sort of divine abortion, when there was another recourse? (King 324-25)

Readers are allowed to follow Louis’ train of thought, which allows an understanding of Louis’ motivation. The reader may also relate this to their own experiences of grief. This correlates to Leake’s discussion of difficult empathy, where he states that it is when we “attempt to reach out based upon our emotional experiences . . . to better understand and approximate the otherwise abhorrent feelings and actions of an inhumane character” (177). When given an insight in Louis’ mind and thought-processes, it is possible for the reader to contemplate the same questions and understand his decisions even if they disagree with them. However, the reader also knows more than the characters of the novel, since the reader has been given the chance to puzzle together the different perspectives and the foreshadowing that permeates the novel. The reader is then more aware, in contrast to the character, of the dangers of the possible resurrection, which may weaken Louis’ arguments. Furthermore, it is possible that the readers will ponder the question themselves: “Would I not bring back a loved one, even if there was a risk that the person would be changed?” This creates an excellent opportunity for difficult empathy, where the readers can not only learn about the character Louis, but also themselves.

Through the rest of the novel, Louis becomes more and more of a character with whom the reader may find it difficult to empathize with, yet not impossible. One such instance is where Louis lies to his wife and convinces her to go to her parents in Chicago with Ellie (King Sematary 327-30). This is a scene which strains the empathy for several reasons. First of all, the character lies to his family and exploits Rachel’s fragile state as she is both in grief but also affected by Valium (King Sematary 327-30). Lying to one’s family may be seen as dishonest and can lead to readers finding Louis
less likeable. Secondly, as a doctor, Louis knows that it can be very damaging for the ones grieving to remove themselves from the object of their grief, instead of staying to process it (King *Sematary* 327). This means that Louis does not only lie to his family, but also potentially harms them. All this could make the protagonist into a less likeable character for the reader, however, the motivation behind the character’s actions is clear. Louis does these things in an attempt to “save” his son. This is the redeeming aspect of the character, something that the reader can possible understand, and which allows Louis to invoke empathy in the reader. The difficult nature of the empathy invoked can possibly lead to realizations that unsettle the reader and force them to reflect on themselves (Leake 175). It is possible that the reader once again considers their own possible actions in a similar scenario.

Jack Torrance, the final character that will be analyzed in this essay, offers quite a contrast to the other characters. Unlike the children who appear to only invoke easy empathy, the mothers who only appear to possess some minor flaws which could cause the reader to find some aspects of the characters harder to empathize with or Louis who changes towards the end, Jack Torrance invokes both easy and difficult empathy throughout the entire novel. Of course, it becomes more difficult for the reader to empathize with the character as he descends into madness and becomes more abusive to his family, similarly to Louis. However, even from the first page of the novel, Jack shows certain characteristics which the reader may dislike. The novel is also permeated with constant foreshadowing towards Jack’s descent to evil, as Danny receives hints through his “shining” that his father will try to kill him. This means that the reader always knows that the character will turn evil, which could work against the reader’s ability to empathize with the character. Instead the reader has to “reach out” as Leake states, in order to feel empathy (176).
In the first chapter of the novel, the reader is introduced to Jack, who is attending an interview with the hotel manager Ullman, for the job as the hotel’s caretaker over the winter (King *Shining* 3-10). During the interview Jack appears to struggle to keep his temper, as he finds Ullman appalling. While he manages to keep his anger in check, which can make the reader empathize with Jack, his anger may also seem somewhat unmotivated which could make it more difficult for the reader to feel empathy. This shows in the first line of the novel: “Jack Torrance thought: *Officious little prick.*” (King *Shining* 3) The anger portrayed through the character is completely unmotivated as far as the reader knows, for no information has previously been given about Jack’s rage. While Ullman later states that he is disliked by his staff, the anger that the character struggles to keep in check seems to be slightly exaggerated as he keeps repeating the opening phrase in his head whilst Ullman speaks:

> Jack’s hands were clenched tightly in his lap, working against each other, sweating. *Officious little prick, officious* –

> “I don’t believe you care much for me, Mr. Torrance. I

> *Little prick, officious* –

> Don’t care. . . (King *Shining* 5)

Repeating such a mantra, Jack appears to be furious rather than annoyed or slightly offended, which perhaps is a more reasonable reaction to Ullman’s condescending behavior. The rage only increases as the hotel manager brings up Jack’s alcoholism and when the meeting finally ends, Jack is glad that Ullman does not offer to shake hands (King *Shining* 10). Judging from this, the reader’s first impressions of Jack can be quite problematic. That does not mean that it is impossible for the reader to empathize with Jack though. Leake states that one way of empathizing with someone’s anger is by remembering a time when one was angry, even if not to the same extent (177). The beforementioned quote is also a prime example of how the reader is “shown” Jack’s
anger instead of “told”. As such, it could help the reader to relate to Jack’s emotions, even if they have not experienced them to the same degree (Nikolajeva “Did you feel” 98). This means that the reader may struggle with feeling empathy towards Jack, as they may distrust his violent and ill-tempered nature, but at the same time might be able to relate to his anger.

The reader’s possible dislike for Jack may increase further during his second appearance in the novel. Before that, the reader has learned that Jack lost his previous job as a teacher for beating a student who had slashed his tires, and that Jack sometimes loses control when he is angry (King *Shining* 13-14). In the novel’s third chapter, Jack is given instructions on how to work the hotel boiler, which heats up the entire hotel. Jack hardly listens to the instructions, as he is experiencing flashbacks to the night he broke his son’s arm:

> He had been drinking a beer and doing the Act II corrections when Wendy said the phone was for him, and Danny had poured the can of beer all over the pages. Probably to see it foam. . . He had whirled Danny around to spank him, his big adult fingers digging into the scant meat of the boy’s forearm, meeting around it in a closed fist, and the snap of the breaking bone had not been loud, not loud but it had been very loud, HUGE, but not loud. Just enough to slit through the red fog like an arrow – but instead of letting in sunlight, that sound let in the dark clouds of shame and remorse, the terror, the agonizing convulsion of the spirit. (King *Shining* 17)

Even after injuring Danny, Jack continues to drink until he and his friend Al believe they have run over a child in the middle of the night. It appears that they never hit anyone, only a child’s bicycle, yet it is enough of a scare for both of them to make them realize that they have to stop drinking (King *Shining* 39-42). All this can make Jack into a character with whom the reader might find it difficult to empathize with. He is not
only violent and an abusive father, but he also does not attempt to better himself until he believes his drinking has led to a child’s death. This would then require the reader to try to “reach out” in order to empathize with Jack. This more conscious action of attempting to understand Jack is relatable to Leake’s difficult empathy (176-77). As the plot progresses, Jack’s temper remains quite unstable. While he is not abusive towards his family until his obsession with the hotel increases and the hotel is starting to control him, his angry and violent side is often revealed to the reader.

At the same time, it is also possible to see Jack as a victim to his addiction and temper. Even Jack sees himself as a “nice guy”, and seems to lay the blame of his addiction on something inside him, as if:

he had unwittingly stuck his hand The Great Wasps’ Nest of Life . . . He had stuck his hand through some rotted flashing in high summer and that hand and his whole arm had been consumed in holy, righteous fire, destroying conscious thought, making the concept of civilized behavior obsolete. (King Shining 110)

While this may seem a selfish act and a way for Jack to avoid blame, the reader is also given small hints to what lies behind Jack’s addiction and bad temper which gives the reader a chance to understand the character. Throughout the novel, Jack sometimes thinks back on his own childhood, where it becomes obvious that his father also was a violent alcoholic (King Shining 109, 221-26, 328, 379-80). Through these flashbacks, the reader is given information which makes it possible to empathize with Jack, as he becomes a victim to an abusive father. This can be connected to Keen, and how it is easy to empathize with victims, and especially children who are abused or mistreated (Keen 69-70). Through this perspective, Jack is both oppressor and victim, which makes the empathy that he may invoke in the reader very complex. It is also possible that the reader may become less critical towards Jack’s abusive nature, and deem his actions as justified. If this novel is to be applied to the EFL-classroom, the teacher should be
aware of this and, perhaps through discussions with the students, clearly define the
difference between understanding the reasons behind a behavior and accepting it.

Furthermore, Jack can also be seen as a victim to the evil Overlook hotel, as it
uses his weaknesses to turn him into its puppet. There are also several instances where
the hotel also scares him, such as the scene where he believes the hedge animals are
stalking him, or his encounter with the woman in room 217 (King Shining 206-09, 253-55). This can lead to the reader empathize with Jack and his powerlessness. Eventually, it gains control of him by offering him alcohol, a place in the hotel, and convincing him
that he has been mistreated by his family (King Shining 340-55). It becomes clear for
the reader that Jack is being used and deceived by the hotel, which Jack is completely
unaware of.

While this analysis mainly has focused on how Jack can be difficult to
empathize with, but not impossible due to his victimization, there is one final aspect of
the character that can help the reader to easily empathize with Jack, and that is his
attempts to do good, to be the husband and father Wendy and Danny deserve. Keen
claims that since “an author has felt with all her creations as she imagines them, not just
reserving emotional investment for favored protagonists, then the opportunity for
readers to bond temporarily with monsters, madmen, and villains can be regarded not as anomalous, but as a standard feature of fiction” (131). In other words, there are most
likely some features in every character, even antagonists and villains, that the reader
may empathize with. Keen does not differentiate between easy and difficult empathy, but the beforementioned quote could possibly be related to difficult empathy since it
deals with the ability to empathize with characters who the reader dislikes. This is true
for Jack, as his good side shows time and time again, usually through his love for his
son.
Early in the novel, it is showed in his interaction with Danny and the deep connection the two have. It is also apparent in his fight against the urge to drink. Furthermore, as Jack becomes more and more obsessed with the hotel, and it increases its power over him, he tries to fight it. Not for his own sake, but for Danny’s. In one such scene, after Danny has been attacked by what he claims was a ghost, Wendy tries to convince Jack that they need to leave. Jack’s immediate reaction is anger, and for the first time, the idea of killing Wendy comes up in his mind “from nowhere, naked and unadorned” (King Shining 269). However, when he sees Danny thrashing in his bed from a bad dream, Jack immediately changes and he realizes that Wendy is right, that they need to leave the Overlook (King Shining 269). Something similar happens when Jack is repairing the snowmobile that will allow them to escape. After once again losing to the hotel’s persuasion, which he of course is unaware of, Jack decides to lie to Wendy, and say that he was unable to fix the snowmobile. As he walks out of the shed he sees Danny playing outside. This allows Jack, for a brief moment, to realize that the hotel was taking control over him:

In that instant, kneeling there, everything came clear to him. It was not just Danny the Overlook was working on. It was working on him, too. It wasn’t Danny who was the weak link. It was him. He was the vulnerable one, the one who could be bent and twisted until something snapped. (King Shining 278-79)

Unfortunately, the clarity only lasts for a few moments, before the hotel manages to turn him against his son instead (King Shining 281-82). However, the way Jack is affected by his son shows that he truly loves his him. When the character believes he might have harmed his son, he is filled with feelings, such as regret, guilt or that he is not good enough for Danny. It is then possible for the reader to empathize with these negative emotions he experiences after failing his son (Keen 72).
One final scene, which is worth mentioning as it shows Jack’s good side and how his actions cause him to experience negative emotions, is during Jack’s, who is now possessed by the hotel, and Danny’s final standoff. In the scene, Danny does not try to fight or run from Jack, instead he insists on that the creature he is facing is no longer Jack, but that he is inside somewhere. Eventually, Danny manages to break through to his father:

The face in front of him changed. It was hard to say how, there was no melting or merging of the features. The body trembled slightly, and then the bloody hands opened like broken claws. The mallet fell from them and thumped to the rug. That was all. But suddenly his daddy was there, looking at him in mortal agony, and a sorrow so great that Danny’s heart flamed within his chest. The mouth drew down in a quivering bow.

“Doc,” Jack Torrance said. “Run away. Quick. And remember how much I love you.” (King Shining 428)

This shows the final moment of Jack, before the hotel takes total control. It allows the reader to see that there is some good in Jack, which surfaces in Danny’s presence. It also shows how much negative emotions Jack experiences, which could make it easier for the reader to empathize with him (Keen 72). The reaction Danny has to seeing his real father’s anguish can also be related to Nikolajeva’s “showing” of emotions (“Did you feel” 99). While the reader is only “told” what emotions Jack is experiencing, his son’s reaction to them can be considered to be more of “showing”. As Danny’s heart “flamed within his chest” (King Shining 428), the degree of Jack’s torment becomes very clear to the reader, who more easily can engage with his emotions (Nikolajeva “Did you feel” 98-99). It may be hard for the reader to empathize with the character when he is under the control of the hotel, as he becomes a murderous, abusive father
and husband, but his good side also shows through. It is this agony and regret that the reader can then empathize with.

The analysis of the fathers shows that the characters can invoke empathy in the reader, both easy and difficult. Louis journeys towards difficult empathy, but starts as a likeable character who is easy to empathize with as he experiences some negative emotions through horror. When Gage dies, the empathy that Louis may invoke become more complex, as he can be seen as both a victim and experience negative emotions, but at the same time start to act in such a way that the reader may disagree with. Jack, while sharing a similar journey towards an antagonistic role in the novel, does invoke a more difficult empathy throughout the novel. His angry and violent side could make the character harder to empathize with for the reader. However, Jack can also be seen as a victim to his addiction, and to the evils of the hotel which could help the reader to empathize with the character. Finally, the most redeeming aspect of Jack is the very close relationship he has with his son. This brings out Jack’s good side, and as he struggles to be the father his son deserves, the reader may empathize with the negative emotions he experiences as he fails to accomplish this. Since Jack can be seen as both oppressor and victim there may be some complications when empathizing with Jack. First and foremost, it is possible that the reader may see Jack’s actions as justified, or at least as acceptable, since they may see him as a victim. The question of codependency also becomes apparent with Jack. Wendy, and especially Danny, both love Jack and therefore endures, or accepts, his abusive side, hoping that he will change for the better. This is problematic when using the novel in the EFL-classroom, as some students may have experienced, or is experiencing similar situations, and should therefore perhaps be addressed in some way.
5 Using horror fiction in the EFL-classroom

Students in the Swedish EFL-classroom should be given an education that “promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. 4). By presenting students with characters who can invoke both easy and difficult empathy it can help them to reach farther in their ability to empathize, but also provide somewhat of a challenge for the students. Using horror fiction which features characters that can invoke easy empathy may then be useful since it requires less from the reader when it comes to creating an empathetic connection with characters in the novel. This may help the students read the novel, and perhaps even enjoy it, while they also have to face characters who offer difficult empathy. That way, the students are forced to develop an understanding of “more expansive identities that incorporate the best and the worst of people” (Leake 184). Furthermore, it is possible that the students find the novels engaging and suspenseful, this could help motivate them and become interested in reading (Worthy 209-10; Wozniak 20). Perhaps it is even possible, by introducing students to non-typical school literature which they find engaging, to change the negative view on reading that some students may have (Worthy 205-06).

With this in mind, it appears that horror fiction of this kind can be very useful in the EFL-classroom. Not only for the possibility to offer different kinds of empathy, but also since horror is an engaging literature that can make the reader reflect over taboo, provocative or controversial subjects (Matek 64; Nero and Renner 397). This can be seen in Pet Sematary as Louis debates with himself whether or not he should resurrect his son even though he knows that the child will most likely return changed. In The Shining, the reader may reflect on the character’s actions etc., for example, the question of divorce and how Wendy contemplates it, but decides to stay with Jack. It could lead to discussions of the difficult dilemma of codependency and loving someone who is
abusive etc. While these things may not be exclusive to the horror genre, it is offered while at the same time being a type of literature that the students might find engaging and interesting, and as such, could have a place in the EFL-classroom.

However, it could also be problematic to work with literature which features these dilemmas and themes as some students may be have experienced similar things in their own lives, such as losing a family member or having abusive parents etc. Working with these topics could then be troublesome for the students as it may remind them of their own experiences. This may especially be the case with the Torrance family, as some students may live under similar conditions, with alcoholic and abusive family members. However, this is surely the issue with all literature that deal with such sensitive topics, whether it is horror or not. Furthermore, literature is often said to help the reader reflect over these subjects, while at the same time distance themselves from it, by for instance discussing the characters instead of themselves. This would perhaps be even more effective in horror literature, as the supernatural elements could possibly help the reader to further distance fiction from reality. Working with literature of this kind may perhaps even help students who suffer from abusive family members to open up and talk about it, to the teacher or someone else who they trust. Discussing the topics in class may show them that they are not alone and the teacher can offer the students advice on where they can turn for help if they live under such conditions.

Another complication with using horror fiction in the EFL-classroom is that while the genre may be popular among teenagers and young adults, it is not appreciated by everyone. The “paradox of horror” can explain why some people enjoy horror (Carroll 182; Bantinaki 383). However, not everyone enjoys being frightened, and this is something which should be respected when using horror in the EFL-classroom. Both Pet Sematary and The Shining may be considered to be quite scary, and for that reason, students should perhaps not be forced to read them. One way to work around this would
be to give the students several options of literature to choose from, perhaps from horror fiction aimed at teenagers, novellas or from classic gothic fiction. It is important to keep in mind though, as Richards et al. points out, to choose stories which is not solely focused on scaring the reader (836). *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining*, as have been shown in the analysis, offers not only a suspenseful plot but also easy and difficult empathy and controversial or difficult subjects which can lead to interesting discussions among the students. This is not the case with all horror fiction, just like any other genre. Therefore, the choice of what texts to use in the EFL-classroom is something that requires some consideration.

A second solution to the issue would be to work with only certain chapters or parts. That way, the teacher may choose to remove the most gory or horrifying sections of the novel, while at the same time lessen the amount of reading that the students have to do. This could work with the novels analyzed in this essay and easy empathy, where parts dealing with the characters negative emotions or victimization could be read by the students. It would, however, be more problematic to work with difficult empathy by only reading certain parts of the novels, especially when it comes to Jack, since it may be difficult for the students to grasp the complexity of the character from just reading a few excerpts. To conclude this section, it is clear that working with horror fiction in the EFL-classroom can have benefits, but also several complications which the teacher should be aware of. The purpose of this essay was never to show how this genre should be used in a pedagogical environment, nor that the novels *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* are exceptional examples of horror fiction for such a use. Instead, the hope has been to show that horror fiction can feature aspects which could be used in the EFL-classroom, and at the same time offer the students an interesting, suspenseful read that even reluctant readers hopefully can enjoy.
6 Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to look at two of Stephen King’s most prominent novels and analyze the empathy that the different characters can invoke, and how that can be useful in the EFL-classroom. The child characters in the novels, Ellie in *Pet Sematary* and Danny from *The Shining* both invoke what could be called easy empathy. They are character with whom the readers can easily empathize with since they are often victimized and experience negative emotions. However, as these characters both struggle through the novels, dealing with the horrors of an abusive father, or the loss of a younger brother, it is also possible that the reader may feel pity instead of empathy. The two child characters also possess some kind of supernatural power, which can both lead to more negative emotions and victimization, but also offers the characters a way to act against the evil or horror and perhaps lessen the chance of invoking pity rather than empathy.

The mothers of the novels, Rachel and Wendy, also offer easy empathy to the reader, as they experience negative emotions and to some extent become victims. While Wendy loses some of her position as victim when she faces her murderous husband Jack, Rachel does not achieve the same amount of liberation from her role as a victim. The mothers also appear to be more nuanced characters, as they possess certain flaws which cause them to act in ways that the reader may disagree with. This can possibly mean that the reader can find the characters easier to relate and identify with as they can appear more realistic, which could then lead to them being able to understand and empathize with the characters actions even though they may not agree with them.

Finally, the fathers appear to offer the most complex type of empathy since they can invoke both difficult and easy empathy. In *Pet Sematary*, Louis is for the most part presented as a likeable character, who the reader can easily empathize with. However,
he can also invoke difficult empathy as he lies to his family and resurrects his son even though he knows it could be dangerous. Jack offers a more complex mix of both easy and difficult empathy on his journey to become the antagonist of *The Shining*. Even from the start of the novel, he is presented as a sober alcoholic with a history of violence and abuse. At the same time, it is possible that Jack invokes easy empathy, as he himself can be considered to be a victim, both to his abusive father, the evil Overlook hotel, his addiction and his bad temper. Jack also shows a clear love for his son. The constant negative emotions he experiences as he time and time again fails to be a good father and husband also leads to an aspect of his character which the reader may easily empathize with.

With all this in mind, it is clear that horror novels can be useful in the EFL-classroom as it can invoke different types of empathy in the students. The easy empathy can act as “hooks” for the readers, and may aid reluctant readers as something they can connect to in the story. The difficult empathy forces the students to reflect on difficult questions and can help them to understand characters, and persons in real life, that they might dislike. As such it could help them develop a broader use of empathy, that can be useful to them when it comes to understanding the world and the people that inhabit it. It has also been stated that horror fiction and its use in the EFL-classroom comes with some complications that the teacher should keep in mind, such as the horrifying nature of the fiction which some students may dislike. For further studies it would be possible to expand to other types of novels in the same genre, or conduct an empirical study how students experience these novels. Doing so would broaden the field of horror fiction’s application in the EFL-classroom. Another issue which has been identified during this study that require further research, is the complex and diffuse balance between empathy and pity and what it is that makes the reader experience one but not the other. This is not related to horror fiction explicitly, but rather cognitive literary criticism in general.
and could therefore be researched on different kinds of genres. This essay has shown that horror fiction can have a place in the EFL-classroom, as it can provide the reader with more than just a suspenseful and engaging read. The novels *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* both offer easy and difficult empathy that could help students evolve their ability to empathize with other people, as well as perhaps awaken an interest for reading in reluctant readers.
Works cited


