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Reading for Empathy: How Grace and Dignity in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* Foster All-round Development.

The development of ethical awareness and compassion through reading literature.

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Master's thesis in English literature, ENG-3983, May 2024

Abstract

This thesis examines the presence of grace and dignity in literature to explore the benefits of reading literature to develop empathy and compassion towards others. Literature provides insight into new perspectives, ideas, and cultures. This thesis examines methods to engage with literature to make it a constructive tool for acquiring ethical awareness based on the philosophy of Levinas. Based on a close reading of *Small Great Things* (2016) and *Disgrace* (1999) to pinpoint illustrations of grace and dignity within characters shows how these virtues align with conciliation in society. Further character analysis illustrates how characters develop through awareness of others. The novels display character development, aligning with graceful actions, interaction, and development of ethical awareness. These findings can be implemented in school in reading projects that foster meditation on the contents to support students in learning to interact with the perspectives of literature to develop ethical awareness. This research suggests the use of literature in education to train students in developing these virtues, beneficial to a united society. Specifying methods that foster reflections and engagement with literature to ensure the secondary education of students.

The main theoretical framework consists of Levinas' *The Others* in how ethical awareness and responsibility develop through interaction and awareness of others. The responsibility human beings share resembles the core values stated in the Norwegian core curriculum, *LK2020*, which ensures students transform into compassionate and moral beings.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Ruben Moi. Thank you for your support and motivation throughout the writing process, as well as the development of my thesis. Your continued guidance has been invaluable.

Thank you to my fellow MA students at Lesehuset for the motivation, laughs, and support. Writing this thesis alongside you has been a unique experience and the memories will last a lifetime.

I would like to thank my friends and family for being there when a break was needed. And for the endless support throughout my five years at university.

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1 Introduction.

The incorporation of literature into education fosters both reflection and the development of compassion in students. This is achieved by exposing them to diverse perspectives and allowing students to cast judgement. Amno Reichman states in “Law, Literature and Education”: “the benefit of literature as a learning tool is not that it makes readers judge empathetically; rather literature teaches one to withhold judgment so that when judgement is ultimately rendered it is more profound and meaningful” (2006, p. 297). Jodi Picoult’s *Small Great Things* (2016) and J.M Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) both feature situations where the main characters are put into disgraceful situations. Reading about their conduct in morally complex situations is constructive in the secondary education of dignity, citizenship, and social learning as readers can gather insight from various perspectives and understand each character's reasoning. In *Disgrace* David Lurie is forced change as society around him changes due to the abolishment of apartheid. Later he is forced to listen to the rape of his own daughter, unable to help her in any way. After their home invasion and the rape of Lucy, David Lurie must learn to respect Lucy’s wishes. She is the victim in the situation, and Lurie has to try to let go of his discrepancy between his idea of justice and recognize the needs of others to salvage his relationship with his daughter. The change he should conduct is aligned with the notion Sells et al.’s state in “Pain and Defense Versus Grace and Justice: The Relational conflict and Restoration Model” that “grace becomes a means to break the pain-defense cycle” (2009, p. 208) regarding how grace is more beneficial than defense and pain to restore relationships. In *Small Great Things* Ruth is a victim of racism at her workplace. Ruth’s superiors tell her that she has to respect the wishes of a white supremacist family that refuses to let her, an African American, touch their baby. Respecting their wishes is an example of respecting others without reciprocated respect. David Lurie and Ruth both have to come to terms with ideas of grace and dignity in complex situations of pain, shame and degradation. This thesis examines the importance of grace in Jodi Picoult’s *Small Great Things* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. The main aim is to study how the presence of grace and dignity in literature can create an opportunity to understand other cultures and to develop acceptance and conciliation. Furthermore, this research aims to see how teachers can use literature in interdisciplinary topics in Norwegian schools and to consider how reading about grace and dignity can be vital in education and secondary education.

This thesis examines the presence of grace and dignity in *Disgrace* and *Small Great Things*, based on Levinas’ philosophy of the others. Further, it examines how to attain the insight

provided by literature in education and its relevance to the Norwegian core curriculum (2020) and core values of education present in interdisciplinary topics. The following chapter consists of the theoretical framework an overview of Levinas's philosophy, and how literature is beneficial in providing insight. *Disgrace* and *Small Great Things* are covered in chapter three and four, their chapters consist of close readings of the novel to identify grace, dignity, and awareness of others in characters. The fifth chapter is a comparison of the novels. The chapter concentrates on what character development and insight the novels provide to their readers. The sixth chapter, following the comparison of the novels is an examination of the possible use of *Disgrace* and *Small Great Things* in education based on their relevance to the core curriculum and interdisciplinary topics. The chapter includes methods to use literature, specifically excerpts from *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* in education.

1.1 *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace*.

Coetzee and Picoult's novels engage in complex ways with the phenomenon of grace. *Small Great Things* features different narrators and their points of view regarding the trial of Ruth, an African American nurse. Ruth must show dignity and grace when she gets explicitly ordered not to touch the newborn baby of a white supremacist couple. When the newborn suffers a cardiac arrest, she faces an impossible dilemma. Should she follow the discriminatory order from her supervisor or honor the nightingale pledge? The nightingale pledge, constituted in the spirit of the founding mother of modern nursing, Florence Nightingale (1820 – 1910), is an oath all nurses pledge to, in which they promise to pass their life in purity and to honor their profession faithfully, to take care of those sick and in need with loyalty, and to keep devoting themselves to those who are committed to their care. Ruth's superiors decided she could not touch the baby, inhibiting her from honoring the pledge. Getting charged with murder, Ruth is the one who has to face the consequences of the discrimination she herself received. Leading up to the trial, Ruth has lived a life where she is graceful and accepting towards others. When she experiences racism, she excuses it, ignores it, and chooses to change herself to better fit into the white society she lives in.

Disgrace features Professor Lurie's life as it changes direction drastically after he is accused of rape. Rather than fighting back or excusing the behavior he gets accused of, he decides to move out of the city to visit his daughter, Lucy. On this journey, he is faced with several ethical dilemmas and has to come to terms with his way of thinking. When being exposed to a new environment, participating in his daughter's life, Lurie is commended to change his

world perspective. Challenged by his daughter, Lucy, and her friend Bev Shaw, he must accept that times have changed. David Lurie is unapologetic for most of his actions, and ignorant to the hurt he has inflicted. David prefers to blame others. To salvage the last of his relationships, he has to endure some self-reflection and accept the grace that those he has hurt offer him.

Both *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* concentrate on the transformation of learning from and accepting others. In both novels, the characters face people with different perspectives shaped by their backgrounds. The characters' journey of learning about others and their reasoning which eventually leads to meeting them with understanding, not conflict, make up central parts of these novels. Actions incomprehensible to many characters force them to reflect upon their perspectives and challenge their mindsets. The perspective of several characters in Picoult's novel *Small Great Things* are shaped by decisions made with grace. Questions of grace are always implied in Coetzee's novel, as the title illustrates so clearly *Disgrace*.

Grace is the moral universe in which J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things* unfold, as the content of the term grace is based on its context. Forgiveness, acceptance, respect, and benevolence which are all common features of grace. Grace is altruistic. Being graceful is a trait that people present when they treat others with acceptance, kindness, and humility even when it is not reciprocated. In *Small Great Things*, Ruth, an African American L&D nurse, is forced to show grace when faced with discrimination. In contrast, David Lurie expresses that he has been a victim of discrimination and refuses to accept accountability, even when offered grace. The difference in how they need to act under scrutiny is a result of their background, race, and privilege.

Jodi Picoult wrote *Small Great Things* to foster discussions about ingrained racism and prejudice. Picoult's aim by writing from the perspective of an African American nurse was to provide new perspectives to the conversation. Literature provides an opportunity to learn from unfamiliar perspectives. Picoult states that she needed to write the book as Trump had won the presidential election and hate crime surged (Clark, 2016). Gay argues in her review of the novel that it is evident that Picoult has done her research to write the book, but it does not necessarily translate to authenticity. Elaborating on this claim Gay states "the more we see of Ruth and her family, the more their characterization feels like black-people bingo — as if Picoult is working through a checklist of issues in an attempt to say everything about race in

one book” (Gay, 2016). However, the different perspectives and stories focus on how racial prejudice can affect individuals based on their interests, perspectives, and experiences. These separate stories are how conversations begin and how readers of all kinds, including students in upper secondary in Norway, can learn from literature, in particular Picoult’s *Small Great Things*.

Anker argues in “Human Rights, Social Justice, and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” that J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* portrays how literature cannot provide an absolute definition of what human rights are (2008, p. 234). *Disgrace* is a series of illustrations of ethical dilemmas featuring social justice and human rights. David Lurie is a manifestation of inconsistencies regarding how the law should protect violations against human rights. When Lurie is accused of rape and faces a trial, he views it as an invasion of privacy. When his daughter is a victim of rape, Lurie feels like there needs to be principles to ensure justice. The change of perspective regarding law and social justice could be attributed to either Lurie’s growth when exposed to new outlooks or his self-interest in the rape of his daughter. The development of new perspectives is an illusion of grace and dignity, while it is self-serving. Anker states that readers have to question the ethical insights Lurie has endured because his growth is not proven (Anker, 2008, p. 243). Grace, dignity, and growth in *Disgrace* cannot be transmitted through model teaching, but mediations. Attention and the opportunity to discuss ethical dilemmas and social injustice can provide Norwegian pupils with new perspectives to ensure the understanding and acceptance of others.

Small Great Things and *Disgrace*, in all their accusations and ethical dilemmas, illustrate the differences in grace received from the society based on background and identity and the privilege to show, or not show, grace to others. Both *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* provide ethical dilemmas that force both main characters and readers to reflect upon their perspectives on dignity and social injustice.

1.2 Ethics and Education.

The importance of reading about ethics and the motivation behind benevolent actions is imperative. In *Learning from the Other* (2003) Todd states:

The magnitude of violently lived realities of homelessness, poverty, sexism, racial injustice, and genocide is, to me, the very reason why ethics not only demands immediate attention but why education needs to concern itself with ethics. It is only by

anchoring ethics and education to the tangibility of people's lives and their interactions that we might then explore hopeful possibilities for living well together. (2003, p. 1)

With multicultural classrooms and increased social injustice it is crucial for Norwegian students to develop the ability to reflect upon not only what a good deed is, but the reasoning behind it. To include lessons on what grace and dignity might be in school do ensure a secondary education where students develop an understanding of how they can become responsible citizens, that spread kindness and acceptance toward others. Literature that fosters reflection upon grace and human dignity provides one tool to ensure this education. The use of literature to foster reflections is supported by research. Buganza argues that "literature can be considered an excellent motor for moral education and, why not, for ethics: the latter, due to the fact that it provides a good incentive to reflect on moral" (2012, p. 134). Literature has been a tool to criticize society throughout history through dissecting and exploring unfamiliar and complex themes and experiences. Content, themes, languages, and form are all literary devices that contribute to moral education and ethical reflection. Reading about unfamiliar experiences and new characters forces readers to explore different mindsets, settings, and ethical dilemmas from new perspectives. These new insights are a crucial incentive to reflect upon ethics and moral, as the reasoning behind actions. The definition of right and wrong has transformed throughout history, but literature has continuously reflected upon right and wrong, the morals behind decisions, and how right and wrong have developed through societal changes. Buganza also highlights the importance of acknowledging others, especially how acknowledging others is a source of reflection within ethics: "the neuralgic point of ethics is the acknowledgment of the other, the acknowledgment of its humanity, that is, the acknowledgment of what a person is" (2012, p. 127). Without compassion and consideration for others, humans would not need to make ethical assessments in daily life.

Ethical dilemmas and portrayals of social injustice are central themes in literature. Both are vital to understanding ethics and individual reasoning and reflect on empathy and ethics. Literature portrays perspectives from unfamiliar settings that make humans acknowledge the dignity and existence of others. The wide variety of literature ensures the acknowledgment of all human beings (Buganza, 2012, p. 128). Literature does not discriminate what stories or perspectives they share. For this reason, it is crucial to read literature where the main characters face ethical dilemmas and make uncomfortable decisions. In doing wrong or not doing right, characters and readers can learn and develop their understanding without

sacrificing their dignity. “A person’s dignity is the root of all considerations and rights that are owed to him because of the simple fact of being just that” (Buganza, 2012, p. 129) simply being human and in a constant transformation is enough to deserve dignity. To extend compassion and dignity to others is a sign of empathy of others.

Humans develop empathy through ethics. In “Ethics, literature, and education” Buganza (2012) states:

Empathy has a clear ethical function, for this philosophical branch has to do with, among other aspects, the relationships that are established with others. Among the multiple relationships that are established with the rest, one of them may be empathy. Empathy consists of an interpretative, passionate-intellective exercise, based on which one tries to comprehend the situation of another human being. (2012, p. 130)

In assessments of right and wrong and reflections surrounding the behavior of others, readers exercise their innate ability to show compassion. When creating relationships, we learn to acknowledge and accept other opinions. Showing this type of empathy of others existence is a crucial part of being an ethical being.

The development of empathy from literature is due to the insight provided by novels. Using the insight provided from literature to ensure all-round development constitutes engagement with the material. In “Novelistic Empathy, and How to Teach It” (2013) Gary Saul Morson comments upon how literature and novels, in particular, can be used in the education of empathy and ethics due to the perspective novels provide. Morson claims that the unique feature of literature is how:

Philosopher can teach us that we ought to empathize with others. Anthropologist and sociologist recommend understanding the perspectives of distant cultures, while historians do the same for past centuries. But these disciplines do not involve actual practice in empathy. Great literature does ...” (2013, p. 207).

Further, he exemplifies methods and practices to engage with literature to develop ethical awareness and acceptance of others, that make use the insight and perspectives present in literature.

1.2.1 Grace.

To understand the importance of grace in literature, it is crucial to be familiar with the use of the term and its various meanings. “The word grace is given varying meanings in different contexts” (Sells et al., 2009, p. 207). Grace as a concept is present in several world religions, often described as having grace. Using a higher power to define grace illustrates the selflessness of grace. Offering grace should come out of kindness of the heart, rather than to receive something from it. The grace of God is a common saying that illustrates how God presented humanity with grace by creating the world and entire humanity. The Grace of God is what made him sacrifice his son for the sin of humanity as told in John 3:16 “for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Version). This religious perspective connects grace to gratitude and benevolence. Being thankful and appreciative is graceful in a way that shows the presence of gratitude. Being forgiving is closely related to gratitude as it illustrates appreciation and acceptance. While being grateful for ones surroundings one does not need to criticize others for their imperfection. Being thankful and appreciative of even other flaws leads to an openness for change in others and oneself. Learning to appreciate the small things in life includes the ability to forgive others when they wish to make right.

Grace is not only a divine concept; ideas of grace also govern a secular human outlook. Having good manners is used as a synonym for having grace, which shows how being graceful is an ability to express respect to others and be open and honest. These are all essential qualities to have as members of a society. To show respect to others is a crucial part of relationships. Showing others respect creates opportunities to learn from each other alongside making others feel seen and heard as participating members of society. Being open and honest to others is as important as listening to their opinions. By offering your own experiences and perspective you are vulnerable as a means to develop relationships and society further. In addition, by discussing our individual experiences, society can learn from each other and find common ground. “In this context, grace is implemented as an important factor in breaking the pain-defense cycle within human relations” Schellekens et al. state in “A Lay Definition of Grace” (2021, p. 81). Exhibiting or having grace in situations with suffering can lead to better outcomes by focusing on how to change the perspective and better the surroundings that have led to pain and suffering. Redirecting the situation from pain and suffering to find common ground, listen, and learn is more beneficial than indulging in suffering.

The Oxford English Dictionary emphasizes both the divine and the mundane values of grace in its abstract definition: “an attractive or pleasing quality or feature” (Dictionary, 2023). Based on this definition, having grace or being graceful can be compared with being benevolent and forgiving. Grace expressed acceptance and understanding by listening to others. Showing your peers grace allows others to grow and learn from experiences. Grace creates opportunities for change and having conversations and opinions that differ. Grace is in addition used as an adjective meant to describe someone acting gracefully by showing grace or elegance (Dictionary, 2023). The juxtaposition of grace and elegance shows the similarities between the two nouns, both illustrate a natural and calm collectiveness that creates solutions, openness, and acceptance rather than seclude others from participating in society. Offering grace, or being graceful, is an opportunity to move relationship and society forward together. Society will develop through listening and learning from others. In this context grace is related to dignity, by accepting different opinions everyone has the possibility to participate in society.

Offering grace to others with new perspectives dignifies them to participate in conversations. Acceptance and understanding are central parts of being open to discussions. Offering grace to others creates opportunities to develop connections between groups or individuals. Grace serves as a facilitating factor to counter pain and defense cycles as it motivates to act constructively and positively rather than to keep engaging in disagreements and conflict. Acting with grace is powered by the wish to create change and is not controlled by the desire for reciprocal compensation (Sells et al., 2009). Grace is a measure to end conflict by the good of one’s heart, not the wish to receive anything from it. By focusing on forgiveness and gratitude, giving grace gives a unique opportunity to move forward and keep developing rather than repeating pain- cycles. Ending conflict serves the possibility to create solutions that benefit society together. Being graceful reveals the humility of acceptance and forgiveness, an important life lesson. Being granted grace could be an opportunity to experience gratitude toward receiving acceptance. Promoting a society with openness and acceptance within relations.

Grace is a term that is defined by its context: divine, human, social, and relational. The meaning of grace can change by what situation it is in. However, the different contexts share some central ideas about how grace and dignity impact conflict resolution. Grace is a tool to try to accept and recognize their perspective rather than fight. In modern language grace is a collective term for doing good for others, out of integrity and the importance of benevolence.

Being graceful is connected to having good manners and treating others with respect and dignity. Accepting new perspectives and input based on cultural background and lived experiences. Being open to other opinions allows others to be who they are. Grace is a tool to listen and learn from the different perspectives that exist in our society. Having the grace to listen creates a unique opportunity to hear and learn about unfamiliar cultures and gain insight into other cultures and perspectives. Being graceful to various perspectives also makes us accept what we cannot change and discover how society can develop through being familiar with the perspectives of others.

Sells et Al. (2009) argues that acting with grace is determined by the motivation behind the deed. Acting with grace is kindness and done without ulterior motives. The unconscious idea of others develops compassion; humans learn to accept, understand, and act ethically through the subconscious awareness of others. As humans transcend the self-centered idea that everyone shares the same experiences, humans learn to act in a mindful manner that contemplates the individual and cultural differences within society. Encounters with the other explores ethics and its motivation in an attempt to try and understand how and why humans act the way they do, and how they justify their actions.

Grace is also a question of ethics. If having grace is being benevolent, a characteristic immanence of kindness, then having or offering grace is not an active choice made by the individual. Sells et. al state that acting with grace is motivated by the belief that acceptance can end conflict and understanding (Sells et al., 2009, p. 207). Levinas' philosophical theory of the other states that being aware of others and their worldview and lived experiences confronts humans with the vulnerability of others. With the vulnerability of others present, humans, as ethical creatures, must take responsibility for our actions and how they affect others (Visker, 2015, p. 39). Awareness of the differences between others and shared perspectives is a crucial lesson in acceptance, understanding, and collectiveness, where each has the responsibility to respect others.

That the other appears in his or her own light, rather than in my own as things do, does not mean that I cannot treat the other as a thing. However, the other can protest my doing so, and this contestation is different from the one by which things invite me to reconceive the pattern in which I have tried to locate them. (Visker, 2015, p. 36)

In interaction with the other, it is vital to be aware of their humanity and to respect their opinions. However, the ability of others to communicate their opinions removes humans from the opportunity to dismiss each other as mere things and forces humans to listen to each other. Being graceful in interactions fosters an environment for acceptance and understanding.

The virtues present under the collective term of grace contribute to its ability to resolve conflict. The virtues included in having or showing grace are aligned with Levinas' moral philosophy and the obligation to maintain ethical awareness toward other beings. Grace is based on respect, acceptance, and understanding, which are all crucial in the transcendental recognition of others. Through interaction, humans learn to show acceptance and understanding towards others due to their existence and presence as beings. Where grace is benevolent and without ulterior motives, developing an ethical awareness is inevitable in interaction with others. The mere presence of others is enough for human beings to feel a responsibility to the wellbeing of other beings because of the differences between us rather than the likeness. In *Totality and Infinity* (1969) Levinas states:

The other is not other with a relative alterity as are, in a comparison, even ultimate species, which mutually exclude one another but still have their place within the community of a genus- excluding one another but still have their definition, but calling for one another by this exclusion, across the community of their genus. The alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity. (1969, p. 194)

Levinas argues that human beings feel an ethical obligation to show empathy, compassion, and acceptance to others due to their presence. Ethical beings recognize other beings and feel responsibility towards others due to their existence and their differences to the self. This obligation or responsibility towards others is transcendental and innate. It is altruistic, like grace, in how it is based on the presence of another being, not by a wish to conduct good or be nice. The presence and existence of something different to us creates an obligation to act with ethical awareness to recognize the needs of others. The responsibility fostered by awareness is vital in its ability to understand new and different beings and their perspectives. While Levinas' ethics of the other emphasizes how the obligation felt to others is due to their distinctiveness, this acceptance of differences has gravity in concern with acknowledging or offering grace to perspectives from different cultures. Judith Butler is one current thinker who

understands Levinas better. In *Precarious Life the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2020) she interprets the correlation between acknowledgment of the other, violence, and conflict resolution (Butler, 2020). With the acknowledgment of others, one would understand others and resolve the conflict based on understanding rather than violence.

1.3 Core curriculum and literature.

Today's classrooms represent the multicultural society we live in. Subjects taught at school should create a sense of interconnectedness between the cultures present in the classroom. English education should aim to educate pupils to respect and appreciate those who come from other cultures and let them recognize that they deserve the same grace from others. Literature is a tool used to promote mutual respect, self-reflection, and empathy in addition to being a method to experience the cultures of others, Stallworth et al. state in "It's Not on the List: An Exploration of Teachers' Perspectives on Using Multicultural Literature" (2006). *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* are literary works that provide new cultures and unique perspectives where pupils can experience and recognize how various backgrounds affect life choices. Sells et.al explains in "Pain and Defense Versus Grace and Justice: The Relational Conflict and Restoration Model" (2009) how grace and justice are more beneficial than pain and defense when solving relational conflict. Grace and justice provide an opportunity to show trust and acceptance, which is crucial to developing relationships. Gaining access to new perspectives allow students to get familiar to new cultures that makes understanding and accepting other cultures accessible, which are all crucial to the all-round development of Norwegian students.

In the *Core Curriculum 2020 (LK2020)*, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (Utdanningsdirektoratet) states that to ensure both education and the all-round development of all students constitutes an imperative principle for education and development in Norwegian Schools: "the school's mission is the education and all-round development (Bildung) of all pupils" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a, p. 10). A vital part of the Norwegian core curriculum is to combine the purpose of theoretical education with teaching that develops the person behind the pupil. Reading literature about history, society, religion, culture, and perspectives ensures that Norwegian pupils are all-round educated to be critical, ethical, and moral human beings.

LK2020 includes education about human dignity, social learning, critical thinking, democracy, and citizenship. Interdisciplinary topics and the core values of Norwegian

education cover the education of the all-round development in *LK2020*. “Primary and secondary education and training is an important part of a lifelong process which has the individual's all-round development, intellectual freedom, independence, responsibility and compassion for others as its goal” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a, p. 10). *LK2020* uses the term all-round development to describe the goal of the secondary education. The term can be compared with the Norwegian “dannelse” or German “bildung”. Furthermore, just like Levinas, *LK2020* stresses “the compassion for others”. The term all-round development is used in *LK2020* to describe the cultivation of well-rounded individuals, who not only prosper in academic situations but have developed an emotional, social, and ethical capacity. All-round development fosters individuals or students beyond being prepared for further studies, to be engaged and empathic citizens. Literature and interdisciplinary methods aim to teach Norwegian students that all people are equal, to acknowledge individuals from diverse groups, to recognize human rights, and to develop empathy towards others. Crucial methods to succeed in this education are listening dialogue, communication, and the development of confidence for pupils to express their opinions (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a, p. 5). Reading literature with cultural variations is a unique method to gain and understand new perspectives. Literature provides access to worldviews distant from what the reader recognize. Reading and discussing literature with ethical dilemmas, racial inequality, dignity, and grace provide opportunities to learn from other cultures and develop new understandings of the surroundings. Both *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* feature different cultures and ethical dilemmas attached to their culture. Meditations upon grace and dignity figure prominently in the novels. Such meditations are also important for each student’s moral progress, and for their integration in class, school, and society.

2 Theoretical framework.

2.1 Levinas` Ethics and the Other.

Levinas attempts to explain the philosophy of respect for the other, how humans should aim to understand rather than perceive others as objects. To prioritize the other constitutes grace and dignity in literature, in education and in life. Empathy for the other and moral concerns in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* correspond with Levinas` philosophy of the ethics of the other. Both novels engage deeply with Levinas` idea that humanity develops through interaction with the other as they balance on the edge between hate and prejudice and empathy and care in human encounters with the other. The importance of the other is stated by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*:

The other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign: his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence. (1969, p. 194)

The acknowledgement of the other is the acceptance that one can never fully understand and comprehend the other. In recognizing the others, it calls for ethical action and compassion, a need to recognize the need of others, and transforms from an ego central perspective to one compassionate of others. The other explains the acknowledgment of others not rooted in our experiences and life, but of the others separate and infinite nature. As readers reflect upon compassion, grace and dignity, they can develop a new understanding of new perspectives due to literature's unique ability to present ethical dilemmas. As Levinas suggests with the other, awareness of the other allows humans to transform from being self-centered and egotistical to understanding the circumstances of others. When accounting for others in actions, humans try to envision the consequences of actions, and literature provides a tool to learn and understand the other perspective based on the variety of literature that exists. The acknowledgement of others assures a relationship. "We would remain within the idealism of a consciousness of struggle, and not in a relationship with the other, a relationship that can turn into a struggle, but already overflows the consciousness of struggle" (Levinas, 1969, p. 199) this quote suggests the distinction between two ways of relating to others: expecting conflict and disagreement or transcending this adversarial framework of relation. Creating a distinction between these two different ways to relate to others, Levinas critiques the idea that conflict and struggle are the basis of human relationships; he offers a new way to see

relationships as a condition that transcends, and possibly precedes, hostility and disagreement. Relationships between humans, even if they include struggle, consists of a larger dimension than antagonism and antipathy. Learning and accepting the other might lead to or include conflict, but it is also the greatest tool for relationships to be more profound. Relationships and humanity call for an ethical responsibility to learn and accept the value of others; relationships provide more than the potential for struggle and conflict. In *Totality and Infinity* (1969), Levinas presents and discusses the respect and care humans have for others and how this empathy can evade conflict. His emphasis on the other is crucial to ethical concerns and our understanding of dignity and grace.

Levinas focuses on the importance of the other in ethical concerns in *Totality and Infinity*. The other, most manifest in the personal encounter and in the face, is a philosophical understanding of how humans understand their fellow beings. The other is not a materialistic item to be touched or seen but an incomprehensible sensation of the existence of others. Levinas states: “the relation with the other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence and leads us to a relation different from the experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist” (Levinas, 1969, p. 193). Faced with the other, relations with the other transform into something more divine and profound. Encountering someone fundamentally different from ourselves allows humans to understand that relationships are more than a materialistic bond based on self-interests; it evades the self-centered and ordinary of life and connects humans with ethics. Faced with others, humans understand that others have different views, experiences, and expectations of life, which gives rise to a recognition of the humanity of others. Co-existence with others both inspires and requires dignity, respect and grace that establish a mutual obligation of responsibility. Engaging with the other is not necessarily a physical dimension but an awareness that enlightens humans to the existence of various people. The encounter with the other makes humans aware of the presence of conflicting, different, and contrasting existence to what we experience ourselves. However, understanding the presence of others also enlightens humans on the ethical principles in life. The awareness of others calls care, compassion and empathy into question as much as estrangement and aggression. Understanding the other is not merely the encounter with the other, it is also the transformative incident that develops from being self-centered and egotistical to emphatic and aware. The development of awareness allows humans to consider the ethical aspect of interactions with others (Levinas, 1969, p. 204). The awareness of the importance of ethics and empathy allows humans to care for each other and show compassion and acceptance, both

essential parts of relationships. Literature such as J.M. Coetzee's *disgrace* and Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things*, offers a unique opportunity to engage with the other and experience stories of other engaging with the other.

2.2 Literature and insight.

“Good literature, unlike superficial or programmatic literature, exposes the reader to the complexity of the human condition even by telling a simple story” Reichmann states in “Law, Literature, and Empathy: Between withholding and Reserving Judgement” (2006, p. 305). Literature provides its readers with the possibility to explore complex and different perspectives, and because readers are aware of its fiction they are not required to act or react. Readers can gather all insight before they have to make a judgment of characters and situations. One component of human culture is the constantly exercised capacity to make judgments (Reichman, 2006, p. 304). Humans judge or interpret experienced situations throughout their lifetime, and these exposed situations and their interpretations are what readers base their perspectives on society on. Reading provides an opportunity to learn about the situation and reflect upon the reality of it before one has to judge outcomes or characters. Exposure and understanding create insight and acceptance of different and challenging perspectives. Reading about social injustice, the grace and dignity enable the readers to engage imaginatively and critically with discrimination and grace. Such intellectual engagement is vital to learning about citizenship and dignity. The insight provided by literature is supported by the knowledge the reader gathers of characters inner thoughts.

Furthermore, literature provides insight into the feelings and intentions of characters. This acknowledgment of feelings creates a familiarity with others unique to literature. This familiarity is a source of compassion and understanding in addition to a measure to develop empathy. Literature focused on ethical dilemmas, right and wrong, are opportunities to learn and reflect upon intentions behind actions and to develop compassion for these. The development occurs as readers understand the perspectives of the characters. In “Ethics, literature and education” Buganza states:

... Through empathy, the interpreter puts himself analogically in the place of the other. This position is cognitive-affective, since, on the one hand, it knows in part the situation of the character and, when making our way in, can generate in him the feeling that the character experiences in words: on the other hand, he may feel a

certain affection for the character, which makes us understand that there are two, only rationally, separated moments. (2012, p. 131)

Buganza reveals how morals and ethics occur through acknowledgement when reading literature. Being moral beings allows humans to offer grace and dignity to others through understanding and compassion. Reading literature allows readers to get familiar with the reasoning behind characters actions, to learn and understand why and how they behave without a need to react immediately as it is in text format, not actions for or against someone.

The partial suspension of factual disbelief and the partial withholding of normative judgment allow for the relationships between author, text, and reader within a cultural space to infuse possible scenarios with significance, and to provides a cognitive possibility to create a world where we are permitted not to automatically activate our ability to decide between good and bad. (Reichman, 2006, p. 306)

Literature expands one's perceptions by using literature as a social space where readers can try to understand perspectives and actions rather than detest them. Literature becomes a tool where readers can recognize the importance of grace and forgiveness in gruesome situations because readers can read the complete story and understand the nuances, before readers are required to judge characters or situations. Grace is a response to injustice, and reading about how characters can show grace when met with social injustice is a method to learn about graceful actions and human dignity.

3 *Disgrace.*

Disgrace (1999) is a novel that reflects upon ethics, morals, and the omission of grace based on the social, historical, and political situation in South Africa. J.M. Coetzee's novel is important because of its ability to engage its readers to reflect upon disgraceful behavior and the reasons behind it. Attridge states: "the inventive literary work, therefore, should be thought of as an ethically charged event, one that befalls individual readers and, at the same time, the culture within which, and through which they read." (2004, p. 160). This illustrates how readers benefit from reading ethically charged novels, to reflect upon what motivation exists behind actions. The disgraceful behavior of David Lurie is an example of characters to learn from in the transcendental transformation he is forced to partially undertake. David Lurie is forced to make changes and develop his perspectives due to his relationships and the cultural change his society experiences. *Disgrace* is set in South Africa, aligning it with the cultural reset and liberal change of South Africa after the end of apartheid. David Lurie both recognizes and rejects this development. Based on his age and lived experience, he represents a cynical mindset that is self-centered and egotistical. When reading *Disgrace*, the reader is presented with the reasonings and thoughts of David Lurie, which provide insight into his perspectives and understanding of ethical dilemmas and the contrast between his thoughts of others and himself. The discrepancy between the moral and ethical rules for others and himself is present throughout the novel. After his daughter is a victim of rape, he is unbearably angry with the perpetrators, failing to recognize that he is himself accused of rape, and has refused to acknowledge the dangers of his actions. David Lurie represents the opposition to change and the inevitable change to develop alongside society, as those close to him refuse to accept the disgraceful way he lives his life. David Lurie's disgraceful action is based on his self-centered manner. He has little ability to acknowledge others, both in acceptance and understanding. The connection between acknowledgment and ethics is considered by Buganza (2012) in "Ethics, Literature, and Education": "however, the concept of acknowledgment must have deeper roots, which might be the acknowledgement of not only women, or slaves, etcetera, but of all human beings" (Buganza, 2012, p. 128). Buganza indicates the importance of acknowledgment of all beings, regardless of their previous privilege or lack of rights, supporting the cultural change of South Africa, allowing all to participate in society. According to Levinas's and Buganza's ethics, David Lurie frequently acts and thinks disgracefully.

3.1 Racism and prejudice.

The cultural context of *Disgrace* set a precedent for David Lurie's self-centered manners. Growing up in South Africa, he, as a white man with an education, has privilege. Lurie is struggling to accept the change of the times. In "Ground zero for a post-moral ethics in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Julie Kristeva's melancholic" Willett states:

While teaching at a hyper-modernized Anglo university in post-apartheid Cape Town, the protagonist of *Disgrace* romanticizes an older style of privilege associated, we can now say, with the first wave of colonizers. This romantic, anti-modern stance estranges the protagonist from his university, and modern rationalized and bureaucratic forms of power that if introduced by the British, no doubt have been intensified as neoliberal globalization replaces earlier forms of capitalist expansion. (2012, p. 5)

This excerpt illustrates how Lurie's mindset and perspectives do not align with the development South Africa has endured. Working at a modern university in modern Cape Town, David Lurie clings to his old and prejudiced perspectives from apartheid. His ideas of gender roles and racial inequality support this idea that David Lurie insists on his romanticization of the privilege first-wave colonizers had, with little to no remarks of the suffering that followed.

Reflections surrounding gender roles are a constant theme of the novel, from his many relationships, including his daughter Lucy and Soraya, the prostitute he meets weekly. David Lurie thinks he has solved the issue of sex with hiring a prostitute, self-legitimizing his own sexism with how much he pays the escort company rather than Soraya herself. He ultimately concludes that their ownership of Soraya and the function that interests him makes sense (Coetzee, 1999, p. 2). This conclusion is unpleasant and jarring, as he questions the justice in paying someone else for her services. The conclusion that because the company own the apartment they meet in and Soraya's services justify the comparison of Soraya as a person, her sexuality, and property as all things that someone can have ownership of. To modify the relationship between customer and client, David deepens their relationship purely based on his perspective of their exchanges. "He likes giving her presents. At New Year he gave her an enamelled bracelet, at Eid a little malachite heron that caught his eye in a curio shop. He enjoys her pleasure, which is quite unaffected" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 5). These tokens are all materialistic tokens bought as presents so he can tell himself that Soraya is pleased, as their

relationship is not a source of pleasure for her, as it is for him. Distracting himself from the fact that he, himself, pays for Soraya's service, he buys her materialistic gifts, trying to dignify their relationship, while still not respecting the boundaries set by Soraya. "A person's dignity is the root of all considerations and rights that are owed to him because of the simple fact of being just that. They are natural rights or inherent to known essence" (Buganza, 2012, p. 129). Soraya, as a person, deserves the same dignity as everybody else, despite her career. David Lurie's deluded attention to Soraya is merely self-serving, and his gifts are self-deluded smoke screens for his exploitation.

The self-centered manner of David Lurie is presented early in the novel. Once a week, he uses an escort company to sleep with a prostitute. David Lurie recognizes that he pays for this service and is aware of his payment to the escort company. However, he can't comprehend the possibility that Soraya does not reciprocate his feelings of endearment. He fantasizes about taking her out for an afternoon rather than just the evenings they spend together to enjoy more time in her company.

Because he takes pleasure in her because his pleasure is unending, an affection has grown up in him for her. To some degree, he believes that this affection is reciprocated. Affection may not be love, but it is at least its cousin. Giving their unpromising beginnings, they have been lucky, the two of them: he to have found her, she to have found him. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 2)

His reflections surrounding their relationship are based on his perception of their relationship and how, because he has developed an affection for her, he cannot comprehend the idea that she does not have some affectionate feelings for him. David Lurie is unaware or wants to be unaware of others and their perspectives rather than account for them when making decisions. David Lurie's behavior is neglectful of Levinas' theory of the other and the ethical obligation that is established when interacting with and acknowledging others. Levinas' states that acknowledgment of the other is crucial to transcend from being self-centered and egoist (Levinas, 1969, p. 193), which David Lurie repeatedly fails to acknowledge.

After the realization that Soraya does not want anything to do with him, he moves on to seduce a student of his, Melanie Isaacs. In his inner monologue, David Lurie seems aware of the possible consequences of his actions. But driven by his sexual needs, he disregards any thought of the consequences for his younger student, who he remarks are 30 years younger

than him. “But the girl he has brought home is not just thirty years his junior: she is a student, his student, under his tutelage. No matter what passes between them now, they will have to meet again as teacher and pupil. Is he prepared for that?” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 12). He has no regard for the possible consequences for Melanie. His only worry is if he will be prepared to meet her again after their fling if he manages to seduce her. David Lurie feels like he, as a man, has rights and is justified to enjoy the beauty of young, beautiful girls just because of the privileged life he has lived. His desire to be with these girls aligns with the idea of his romanticization of previous times and the conviction that because he is a white man, he has the right to do so. He even states this conception to Melanie “‘ Why? Because a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is a part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it’” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 16). Stripping women of their rights and reinforcing the idea that women exist to please men, tends to reveal David Lurie’s misunderstood gender roles. In this moment, he discards all other features of Melanie and reduces her to only her beauty as something that she offers the world. Reducing Melanie Isaacs to her beauty is a disgraceful act that degrades her. David Lurie does not dignify Melanie Isaacs or other women with the acknowledgment of who they are. He views women as something that can offer him something. However, he fails to acknowledge them as their own beings. Levinas’ states in *Totality and Infinity*:

It would seem that between the different surfaces there exists a more profound difference: that of the obverse and the reverse. One surface is offered to the gaze, and one can turn over the garment, as one reminds a coin. But does not the distinction between the obverse and the reverse bring us beyond these superficial considerations? Does it not indicate to us another plane than that with which our last remarks were intentionally concerned? The obverse would be the essence of the thing whose servitudes are supported by the reverse, where the threads are invisible.
(1969, p. 192).

In this excerpt, Levinas` reflects upon the contents of the other beyond the surface, or the façade as he later refers to. In interaction and relationships, we engage with the obverse, or the face, which is what is presented in relations and to society. But to create complete understanding, interactions require consideration of the reverse or the underlying. The other has hidden aspects that can only be understood by acknowledgment of the other. David Lurie puts value in the perceived obverse, the façade that is presented to him. David Lurie does not

care about others to the extent that he is willing to engage with what is not immediately visible or presented.

David Lurie's struggles with relations is depicted when he seeks refuge at his daughters. The complex relationship between them attests to the difficulties David Lurie experience when he must conform to new times or accept others and their opinions. He struggles to fit in and to accept how Lucy has decided to live her life. Already from his arrival at her farm, he seems displeased with the decisions she has made for herself. The idea that his daughter has decided to live a remote life, where she collaborates with other races, such as Petrus, is difficult to accept. David Lurie keeps complaining and speculating on the ulterior motives of Lucy's neighboring farm. To David, Lucy is liberal in her rejection of gender roles, racism, and privilege. Lucy represents the guilt many South Africans have because of the apartheid. After her violent rape, she seems almost passive and accepting, as she is paying for the consequences of years of oppression. David struggles to relate to these thoughts and her reaction to the attack. Further, he can't understand why Lucy does not want her attackers to pay for their crimes as he does. Lucy is aware of this trait of her father, specifically asking him to keep her business private and let her handle it herself: "David, when people ask, would you mind keeping to your own story, to what happened to you?" He does not understand. "You tell what happened to you, I tell what happened to me," she repeats" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 99). His dismissal of Lucy and her attempt to dignify herself through grace which is her need in these times is one of the greatest testaments to his self-centered views. Further he has difficulties accepting Lucy's opinions as she is a young girl and categorically contrasting to his beliefs in dealing with race and oppression. Lucy and David Lurie's reaction to the physical attack is vastly different, both determined by their perception of the changes South Africa has undergone. However, they both see to the past to justify or to explain the rape of Lucy. Elleke Boehmer (2002) states in "Not Saying Sorry, Not Speaking Pain: Gender Implications in Disgrace":

Both Lurie and his raped daughter Lucy eventually seek to accommodate a history of violation through a traditionally feminine physical abjection to, and new responsibility for, that history. As part of its meditation on coming to terms, the novel thus sets up the difficult Levinasian ethic of being for the (abjected) other, or, in Lucy's case, of living as other: a process that is at once deeply personal and yet impersonalizing. (2002, p. 343)

Lucy seems to have found a way to live with the attack and a reason for her attack by attributing it to the traditional degradation of women in combination with the racial abuse caused by apartheid. Lucy seems to take responsibility for the history of violation and acknowledges how years of oppression have led to the attack. Her acceptance, or trial to accept it, is a wish to act with grace, to find a method to continue living her life in a way that is meaningful to her. Keeping her father from speaking on the situation means she can continue to control the narrative with dignity for her and her experiences. David Lurie's refusal to accept Lucy's perception shows a lack of grace and dignity and illustrates his idea of knowing best without accounting for the others affected.

3.2 Being self-centered and egotistical.

David Lurie's relationship with women is a source of self-centered and egotistical behavior. He puts his own needs in front of others multiple times. David recognizes his behavior where he acts with questionable morals but fails to acknowledge or change this. In his relationship with Soraya, he realizes he has crossed boundaries when he sees her outside, and he recognizes the awkwardness of the situation and has, to some extent, an understanding of why Soraya would take a break from their weekly meets after this. However, he still decides to track her down after he learns about her resignation. "There is still Soraya. He ought to close that chapter. Instead, he pays a detective agency to track her down. Within days he has her real name, her address, her telephone number" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 9). Through his admission, he realizes he should close that chapter, but instead, he chooses to track her down, not thinking twice about Soraya's actions and what they represent. Again, he cannot comprehend that the girl he pays to spend time with him, is able to create her own boundaries. By viewing women as property, or something to be bought he rejects the autonomy of them. David Lurie believes women exist for his pleasure or to participate in his endeavors rather than being their own beings with their own wants and needs. David Lurie's behavior contrasts with Levinas' idea that in interaction with the other humans develop compassion and empathy as they transcend from being self-centered (Levinas, 1969, p. 193). However, David Lurie's self-centered manners make him reject the acknowledgment of others. His privilege has established his egotistical mindset where he sees others as a burden or something inferior, not something to show compassion and empathy for.

The self-centered manner of David Lurie's behavior is the root of his disgraceful behavior. His first concern is himself, and the acknowledgment of this, combined with the lack of

awareness or willingness to make change, makes him seem even more disgraceful or in lack of grace. As Attridge (2004) states:

“Grace” is not, as it happens, the opposite of “disgrace.” The opposite of disgrace is something like “honor” the OED definition of “disgrace” links it frequently with “dishonor.” Public shame, in other words, is contrasted with, and can only be canceled by, public esteem, disgrace redeemed by honor. (2004, p. 178)

Attridge separates disgrace from grace by contrasting disgrace with honor. His perspective on others is based on his privilege and how his privilege allows him to act in manners others are not allowed to. In his pursuit of Melanie Isaac, when David Lurie realizes that she is not interested in him, he decides to call her, unannounced and admits to somewhat trapping her into going out with him. “There is still time for her to tell a lie, wriggle out. But she is too confused, and the moments passes” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 18). By his own admission, he realizes that telling a lie and getting out of meeting her would be in her best interest, but he is delighted as she is too late to figure out how to get out of their meeting. Again, David Lurie shows no compassion towards the interest of others as he acts purely of his own needs and wants.

The accusation of rape does not seem to surprise David Lurie which is a testament to his self-centered manners. Based on his note that it is not quite rape, and in acknowledging that he has bent the rules of the university with regards for Melanie after their relationship begun. The hearing that follows is a demonstration of how David Lurie feels like his privilege puts him above compassion and consideration of others. In his hearing, he receives grace and an opportunity to provide insight and promise to change to keep his job. However, David does not want to dignify the situation by agreeing. He admits to guilt but stands by the idea that this is who he is, the justification for his actions.

The question comes from the young woman from the Business School. He can feel himself bristling. `No, I have not sought counselling, nor do I intend to seek it. I am a grown man. I am not receptive to being counselled. I am beyond the reach of counselling` He turns to Methabane. `I have made my plea. Is there any reason why this debate should go on?` (Coetzee, 1999, p. 49)

In his stubborn mindset, Lurie even suggests that the hearing stop, as he does not want to apologize or agree to seek counseling, he does not see the need to be counseled. His old age

has made change or development impossible. The entire period after the accusation, David Lurie has accepted the situation without motivation to change the outcome. He receives advice to reflect and take time (Coetzee, 1999, p. 51). But again, his stubborn nature of disgrace has determined the result of the hearing already. He does not dignify the process by taking time to reflect on his behavior and is also not concerned with being honorable, but rather to prove a point. David Lurie does not wish to see the perspectives of others, but strongly believes that he, himself knows best. In decision making he is driven by his ego rather than reflections. Attridge reflects upon David Lurie's reaction to, and his action in his hearing with a belief that it stems from a self-centered and emotional reaction: "in its emotional resonance it seems more like a matter of pique, irritation, and hurt pride taking him willy-nilly down a road whose destination is obscure" (Attridge, 2004, p. 169). The self-centered reaction of David Lurie contrasts Levinas' perspective that all beings transcend from their self-centered views through interaction with others. David Lurie refuses to reflect on what doing the right thing is and rather reacts with emotions based on his feelings.

His blasé reaction to his accusation of rape and his failure to comprehend the lasting impression it has left on his daughter prove his egocentrism. When Bev Shaw points out that he was not there when Lucy was raped and therefore never fully can grasp the complete magnitude of the situation, he reacts with shock:

He is baffled. Where, according to Bev Shaw, according to Lucy was he not? In the room where the intruders were committing their outrages? Do they think he does not know what rape is? Do they think he has not suffered with his daughter? What more could he have witnessed than he is capable of imagining? Or do they think that, where rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is? Whatever the answer, he is outraged at being treated like an outsider. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 141)

This reaction, his shock at the revelation illustrates how he never accounts for other perspectives in his reflections and observations of situations. Rather than reflect upon this information from Bev Shaw that he cannot understand Lucy's pain but should try to support her, David is outraged and insulted that she dares to suggest that he, is an outsider and unaware of the degree of damage Lucy has endured. David Lurie's reaction to the rape of his daughter fully illustrates his self-centered mindset. He is furious, angry, and desperate for justice for himself and Lucy. He fails to see the association with his sexual behavior towards Melanie. Lucy endured a physical attack, while he lured and kept up his pursuit of an affair

with Melanie without taking any responsibility or offering compassion to his victim. Lurie's reaction to the reaction of others to him further supports his innate inability to acknowledge others and their perspectives. However, it has made David Lurie feel a false sense of entitlement for others to respect him while he continuously disrespects others. In *Disgrace and the Ethics of Reading* (2004) Attridge argues that grace is by definition something given, not something earned in the way that Lurie has earned this moment of optimism in his relationship with his daughter. "Grace is a blessing you do not deserve, and though you may seek for grace it comes, if it comes at all, unsought" (Attridge, 2004, p. 180). David Lurie seems close to incapable of thinking of the other, never mind prioritizing the other. This incapability augments the discrepancy between his expectations of others and his actions towards them.

3.3 Ethical transformation

Through accusations, change, attacks, and disagreements with his daughter, David Lurie goes through a variety of ethical dilemmas in deciding how to engage or react in situations. His nature is to justify and excuse himself based on history and innate habits. However, when he leaves the city to live with his daughter, he is forced to face his misconceptions as the people surrounding him refuse to accept his treatment of others. Bev Shaw and Lucy are both female characters who challenge David Lurie, which creates the possibility for moral development and compassion. Lurie's inner monologue gives readers insight into his thoughts and reflections, which is both self-aware and lacks awareness of others, which makes it difficult to pinpoint David Lurie's morals and lets readers reflect on his actions. "The novel is ethically compelling, and yet no moral theory that I know of explains its force" (Willett, 2012, p. 3). It shows the range of David Lurie's morals, which are self-centered and egotistical unable to prioritize the other, as well as reflecting upon his shortcomings, while remaining a self-centered perspective: "he sighs deeply, not stifling to the sigh. 'Forgive me, Lucy,' he says. 'Forgive you? For what?' She is smiling lightly, mockingly. 'For being one of the two mortals assigned to usher you into the world and for not turning out to be a better guide'" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 79). At times he shows willingness to develop, and at other times, he has capitulated to the idea that he is too old to change and better himself. His willingness to develop originates from being self-centered and how situations could be better for him rather than a wish to prioritize the other. His ideal, privilege, and mindset align with his actions, which illustrates that David Lurie rejects the idea of gender equality and is continuously both sexist and racist.

“I suspect it is too late for me. I’m just an old lag serving out my sentence. But you go ahead. You are well on the way’” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 216) there is something resigned in this statement. He knows he is not good, or his behavior is at fault, but still- he has no prospect of transformation due to the privilege he has grown up with, making it hard to develop compassion and acceptance. Lurie acknowledges the privilege he has grown up with, while still not acknowledging the benefits it has brought with it: “fallen? Yes, there has been a fall, no doubt about that. But mighty? Does mighty describe him? He thinks of himself as obscure and growing obscurer. A figure from the margins of history” (Coetzee, 1999, p. 167). David Lurie would not define himself as mighty but obscure, justified by the margins of history. His justifications for his actions stem from the knowledge of the superiority of his race and gender, that is given to him, not in his actions or the decisions he makes.

3.4 Relations to the other.

Throughout the novel, David Lurie acts in a self-centered and egotistical manner without the ability to offer compassion or try to understand the mindset of others, but rather, expecting others to understand him and accommodate his wishes. This belief stems from years of oppression, where he, as a white man, has had the privilege to act in such a manner that disregards others. David struggles to show compassion to the people he engages with. He shows no compassion for Soraya and her need for boundaries. He shows no compassion for Melanie Isaac concerning pursuing her. He struggles to show compassion to Lucy as she needs it. This is all based on his own needs. The magnitude of his egocentric mindset is illustrated through his reaction to receiving help and care after the attack:

Spoken without irony, the words stay with him and will not go away. Bill Shaw believes that if he, Bill Shaw, had been hit over the head and set on fire that he, David Lurie, would have driven to the hospital and sat waiting, without so much as a newspaper to read, to fetch him home. Bill Shaw believes that, because he and David Laurie once had a cup of tea together, David Laurie is his friend, and the two of them have obligations towards each other. (Coetzee, 1999, p. 102)

Bill Shaw’s actions are selfless to the degree that David Lurie cannot comprehend the situation without mocking Bill Shaw for his naïve idea of their friendship, or acquaintance relation. Levinas states that interaction with the other makes humans develop compassion, care, and empathy as we learn that the other is something or someone different, with other perspectives ideas, and insights. In relation to the other, we must accommodate their feelings

and existence as moral beings to fulfill our ethical obligation and responsibility. Throughout *Disgrace*, David Lurie shows no awareness of the other, and the lack of acknowledgment of the differences within humanity is correlated to how he has not transformed from self-centered and egotistical manner to develop his compassion for others.

4 *Small Great Things.*

Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things* (2016) is a novel that features several different characters and the insight they develop after the death of a newborn baby. Set around the African American nurse, Ruth, the novel discovers the implications of racism and institutional racism in modern-day America. Ruth is faced with an impossible ethical dilemma compelled by racism and segregation. The new, supremacist, parents have given orders that Ruth, because of her race, would not be allowed to be in contact with their white baby. This decision, which the legitimacy of is unsure, has fatal consequences as the baby suffers a cardiac arrest. Each character presented in the novel has their own understanding and insight into the case, which eventually turns into a court case. The ethical dilemma of whether Ruth should try to save or respect the rule not to touch the baby is a significant source of grace, dignity, and disgrace, and a display of them all combined with the racial undertones that African Americans have to navigate in society. The novel follows several characters, mainly Ruth, the nurse, Kennedy, her attorney, and Turk Bauer, the supremacist dad who seeks revenge. Allowing several perspectives into the novel grants readers to gain insight into these various perspectives. As Reichman suggest in "Law, Literature, and Empathy: Between Withholding and Reserving Judgement" that one of the benefits of reading is the opportunity to relate and recognize the emotions of the characters in stories (2006, p. 307). In addition to featuring gruesome actions, the novel provides the ability to recognize emotions from various characters, which allows for a deeper understanding of the intricate relations and reactions to each other. *Small Great Things* does not only portray the apparent racism in society, but the institutional differences between the struggle marginalized groups struggle with. In "People Who Fill the Spaces: Jodi Picoult and Sarah Josepha Hale award" Hansen claims: "Picoult takes a proactive stance in her writing regarding her position on an array of political and social topics and has not backed down from discussing those topics due to the possibility of losing readership" (2023, p. 5). The decision to conceptualize institutional racism is a testament to Picoult's morals and the importance of reading and writing about uncomfortable topics to ensure the progress of society. The inclusion of ethical dilemmas and different characters's reaction to decisions enlightens several sides of the discussion, and this allows the characters to acknowledge each other and accept how their background has affected their beliefs. Through the court case, all characters develop their horizons as they learn about each other and are forced to engage and offer grace in a disgraceful situation. Hansen states: "the novel ends with each of the main characters going through an un-learning, of sorts, of the biases and prejudices they had been

led to believe about people such as those they are facing off against (or with, in Ruth and Kennedy's case.)" (2023, p. 5). Regarding how all characters, through interaction with each other learns to acknowledge and recognize the others. *Small Great Things* portrays new relationships and interactions between family, friends, and enemies. All these relationships are crucial to show how humans learn from new interactions with the other and how their encounters and un-learning open the ethical obligations human beings have to others due to their awareness of their existence. Humans are faced with the others unconsciously, and when introduced to the others, the innate empathy and compassion for others creates ethical obligations, care, and understanding for others, regardless of who they are.

4.1 Racism and grace.

The cultural context of *Small Great Things* is significant in the encounter with the other. The setting of a racial conflict and institutional racism is one of the reasons why actions of grace are displayed recurrently. Central to the ethical dilemma Ruth faces, to touch or to respect the racist order not to touch the baby is a question of obedience or professional pride. Further, the implications and considerations Ruth has to make, as an African American woman, add another layer of conflict to the decision. Ruth is familiar with the implications of being African American. She has felt the significance throughout her life. She has worked hard to get to where she is in life. However, Ruth can still recall memories from when she went to school and remember the feeling of being different.

I thought of what it felt like to sit down in the beautiful wood paneled cafeteria and be the only student with a bag lunch. I remembered how MS Thomas had shown us pictures of American heroes, and although everyone knew who George Washington and Elvis Presley were, I was the only person in the class who recognized Rosa Parks and that made me proud and embarrassed all at once. (Picoult, 2016, p. 251)

That the important and well-known African Americans were still less known than their white peers, the feelings Ruth has experienced since her own days in school is a vital part of how she, and others, has learned to live with racism and prejudice. And in turn, living with it turns to teaching it to their children that they need to work harder than their peers to overcome the institutional racism present in society. As Ruth's son, Edison, experiences. "A boy like Edison. I know what she is saying, even if she's careful not to spell it out. There are not many black kids in the High School, and as far as I know, Edison is the only one on the highest honors list" (Picoult, 2016, p. 17). Living with the implication of being African American,

they know of it, they feel it, but they choose not to acknowledge it. These implications will affect any decision made by Ruth, as she recognizes:

At first I lied because I thought I was going to lose my job. Then I lied because I didn't know if I could trust you, and then, every time I tried to tell you the truth, I was so embarrassed that I hid it for this long it got harder and harder.

(Picoult, 2016, p. 425)

This thought process illustrates the repeated considerations she has to make in her day, which others, more privileged, never need to contemplate. Ruth's conception of the considerations she has to make illustrates the considerations she makes daily, not only due to her ethical awareness and obligation that Ruth has for others but because of the imposed judgment she fears. The judgement, or the imposed judgement is contrasting with the natural and idealistic empathy humans feel for each other purely from being and being aware of other, based on Levinas' the others. "The face in which the other- the absolute other- presents himself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it as do opinion or authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural. It remains commensurate with him who welcomes: it remains terrestrial" (Levinas, 1969, p. 203). The relationship with the other is non-violent and non-coercive. It is based on the mutual ethical relationship that calls for the self to respond to the other with respect, care, and responsibility. Ruth's conviction that she has to take other precautions than others is based on the lack of respect, care, and responsibility others have shown her.

The awareness of institutional racism forces Ruth to act gracefully, as the consequences for not doing so are grand. Living in a prejudiced society forces marginalized groups to live in a constant awareness of others while not receiving the same generosity back. For Ruth, this has become a natural part of her life. Ruth offers grace to her white peers daily, excusing their ignorant behavior. "Still, Marie has no idea how often I have to just take a deep breath, and move on. White people don't mean half the offensive things that come out of their mouths, and so I try not to let myself get rubbed the wrong way" (Picoult, 2016, p. 17). When faced with racism, Ruth excuses their actions, not because she finds them offensive, but because she does not see, or want to see the malicious intent, and therefore it is easier to offer grace and acceptance than to get mad. Living with the belief that working hard will get you what you deserve is Ruth's motivation to persevere in life. Ruth chooses to offer grace and acceptance towards those ignorant to bypass the real societal issue, institutional racism. When Ruth receives the order not to touch the baby, her view of the world collapses. She can no longer

reject the reality in front of her, and she is forced to accept that she is treated wrong because of her skin color, and her dutifulness cannot save her. The dutifulness of Ruth is closely tied to her career as a nurse, the belief that she can save children. Being put in a situation where she is unable to help the newborn baby or in a position where Ruth does not know if she should touch the baby, she is unable to act as her instincts tell her to and is again reminded of the racist rules her superiors have implemented. The idea that Ruth is prohibited from executing her work because of her skin color contrasts with Levinas's philosophy of the others which claims that human beings have an ethical obligation to each other. Drawing upon Levinas, Judith Butler states in "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the ethics of Cohabitation" that: "Levinas's position allows us the following conclusion: that the set of ethical values by which one population is bound to another in no way depends on those two populations bearing similar marks of national, cultural, religious, racial belonging" (Butler, 2012, p. 139). Butler highlights the importance of how the ethical obligation does not exist due to proximity or likeness but because of being, existing, and interaction introduces humans to others. When aware of others, human beings feel compassion, accountability, and awareness of the existence, struggles, and perspectives of others.

Ruth has acknowledged others for who they are, even ignoring racism in an attempt to please others, but in the end, she realizes that she has not received the same dignity as she allows others. In "The Inhuman Core of Human Dignity: Levinas and Beyond" Rudi Visker states: "that the other appears in his or her own light, rather than in my own as things do, does not mean that I cannot treat the other as a thing. (Visker, 2015, p. 36). In interacting with others, it is vital to be aware of their humanity and to respect their opinions. However, the ability of others to communicate their opinion removes humans from the opportunity to dismiss them, and humans are forced to listen to them. Being graceful in interactions fosters an environment for acceptance and understanding. Levinas tries to answer how humans are conditioned to respect others, which is a graceful characteristic. Due to Ruth's experiences in life, she has developed an ability to account for and acknowledge others with their shortcomings, but with the decision that she is prohibited from touching the newborn baby, she realizes that this grace does not extend to her. The limitations Ruth experiences related to her race do not limit her ability to experience freedom, based on Levinas' theory of ethics. Her ability to offer grace to others is a testament to her ability to be compassionate in her treatment of others. The empathy and ethical considerations she offer others is true freedom based on her acting with ethical awareness towards others. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas' states:

Freedom then is inhibited, not as countered by a resistance, but as arbitrary, guilty and timid; but in its guilt it rises to responsibility. Contingency, that is the irrational, appears to it not outside of itself in the other, but within itself. It is not limitation by the other that constitutes contingency, but egoism, as unjustified of itself. (1969, p. 293)

True freedom is not to act without constraint but the ability to act with ethical responsibility due to the true freedom one experiences when aware of the limitations of freedom. Acting with ethical awareness, as Ruth does with her graceful behavior, is closer to true freedom than the ability to live without constraint, as the more privileged characters in the novel do. Where Ruth's experiences in life have made her aware of others to the extent that she excuses their racism, the responsibility, and ethical awareness is based on her awareness of the other. This makes Ruth considerate of the needs of others, which leads to her ability to offer compassion towards others.

4.2 Insight and grace.

All central characters in the novel go through an awakening where the trial affects their mindset. In turn, this allows them to develop into more considerate people. The development is a result of the interactions and conversations that happen between the various characters. In "People Who Fill the Spaces: Jodi Picoult and the Sarah Josepha Hale Award" Picoult states in an interview: "I would define my novels as moral and ethical fiction" (2023, p. 8). This idea that the novel is a fictional work encourages the reader to develop their mindsets and recognize the developments the characters experience in going through an ethical and morally tenacious situation. Ruth experiences how the expected rules she has accepted are wrong. She has realized that institutional racism changes the rules.

All my life I have promised Edison that if you work hard, and do well, you will earn your place. I've said that if you work hard, and do well, you will earn your place. I've said that we are not impostors; that what we strive for and get, we deserve. What I neglected to tell him was that at any moment, these achievements might still be yanked away. (Picoult, 2016, p. 253)

This realization awakens Ruth to the fact that she cannot excuse ignorant behavior. Ruth should not ignore ignorant behavior but use interaction to educate and inform others to foster and create change together. Ruth's acknowledgement of the social issues in society is a vital

part of her allowing others to show compassion and empathy for the unjust she faces. This realization is important for Ruth's development of insight. "It is amazing how you can look in a mirror your whole life and think you are seeing yourself clearly. And then one day, you peel off a filmy grey layer of hypocrisy, and then you realize you've never truly seen yourself at all" (Picoult, 2016, p. 253). Ruth's reflections surrounding her realization are an illustration of her finally being able to recognize herself. Levinas' main focal point is the interaction and awareness of others. However, the importance of freedom and the ability to acknowledge the other is crucial.

More, for my position as I consist in being able to respond to this essential destitution of The other, finding resources for myself. The other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated. (Levinas, 1969, p. 215)

Humans are under an obligation to care for and respect others due to their transcendental awareness and interaction with the face. However, it is within the knowledge and recognition of the self that can provide care and empathy for others, especially marginalized groups. Care and respect for others are not purely altruistic, but humans need to find resources within themselves to have the capacity to provide for others. Levinas states that the self has a moral obligation to acknowledge the other, but the ability to manage this awareness is provided by self-awareness, strength, and resilience in the self. The development of ethical awareness that Ruth experiences makes her more equipped to care for others and provide empathy, respect, and awareness of the challenges of others.

Kennedy, Ruth's attorney, is one character that changes through the development of ethical awareness. Her interactions, which give her insight into Ruth's struggles, are central to her ethical development. In addition to Kennedy's recognition of Ruth's perspectives, Ruth herself has developed an understanding and acknowledgment of institutional racism, which allows her to consider how Kennedy's background has shaped her perspectives. As a privileged and highly educated lawyer, Kennedy has never been subjected to the implications of belonging to a marginalized group. With their interactions and eventual development of friendship, Ruth can show Kennedy how and why she reacted as she did to the dilemma she was presented.

That's when I realize that Ruth didn't want me to come here with her because she needed help picking out a present for her mother. Ruth wanted me to here so that I could understand what it was like to be her. The manager hovering, in case of shoplifting. The wariness of the cashier. The fact that out of a dozen people leaving T.J.Maxx at the same time, Ruth was the only one whose bag was checked.
(Picoult, 2016, p. 285)

Spending time together allows Kennedy to experience what Ruth has suffered through her entire life, providing her insight into an uncomfortable situation. The experiences Ruth invited Kennedy to experience with her, she, herself, could never be subjected to. There is grace in Ruth's acknowledgments and attempts to educate Kennedy, which Kennedy returns with the dignity to acknowledge that she has, at times, been ignorant. Ruth has, with her own development, seen and recognized Kennedy, which in turn allows Kennedy to acknowledge her lack of awareness of Ruth's struggles, establishing her ethical awareness. This ethical awareness is vital for respect and compassion in society. In addition, it shows how their friendship is affected by, and affects solutions to social issues. Social issues are often public matters, but the development of ethical awareness and interactions that counteract injustice is often made through interaction between individuals. However, Levinas' comments on how ethical issues cannot be handled simply in the private sphere have implications for the public sphere: "everything that place her "between us" concerns everyone, the face that looks at it places itself in the full light of the public order, even if I draw back from it to seek with the interlocutor the complicity of a private relation and a clandestinity" (Levinas, 1969, p. 212).

To begin with, Kennedy wanted to argue Ruth's case detached from the racist implications. She proposes to focus on the facts of the case in a structural and no-nonsense way, disregarding how the context of the case is undeniably affecting both Ruth and Turk Bauer's feelings towards it. But through her experiences with Ruth, she learns that her reputation and pride are more important than a victory in the case because of Ruth's experiences in life. When Kennedy can remove herself from the privilege she has experienced life with, which in turn has altered her perspectives, she acknowledges and accepts Ruth's feelings and dignify her. "Is it worth being able to say what you need to say if it means you land in prison? If it nets you a conviction? That goes against everything I've ever been taught, everything I've ever believed. But I'm not the one on trial" (Picoult, 2016, p. 428). This realization prompts Kennedy to separate her perspectives from acknowledging what Ruth needs. She offers compassion with her understanding of Ruth's wants, based on the challenges she has been

through. Kennedy experiences that through her interaction with others, she has broadened her perspectives to develop compassion. Kennedy's development aligns with the transformation Levinas` argues humans go through when introduced to the other. "The face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge" (Levinas, 1969, p. 198). Kennedy has through interaction and relationships been shown the face, the matter behind. The revelation of the face exposed her to a marginalized group of humanity that needs acknowledgment, compassion, and empathy due to the treatment they have received, and after Kennedy has learned, experienced, and understood the implications of being African American she cannot reject or refuse the wrongdoings of society.

4.3 Conflict and The Other.

Conflict is central in *Small Great Things*. Centered around a trial, the main conflict happens in the courtroom. However, the novel also depicts conflict between individuals and beliefs. Presented in the courtroom is the racist conflict between Ruth and the Bauers. In addition, both Turk Bauer and Ruth battle internal conflicts within. Turk Bauer, and his wife seek revenge for their dead son, while he has to acknowledge his role in the death of his son based on the detrimental decision to prohibit Ruth from touching or tending to the baby. Filled with grief, the realization that he, most likely, is partly to blame for the death of his child eventually is part of his un-learning and his development from blind hate. Early on, the Bauer's are presented with blinding hate for African Americans. Turk Bauer's racial beliefs are presented from the moment he is introduced as a father-to-be: "right now, my baby is perfect. But from the moment it arrives, it's bound to be tainted" (Picoult, 2016, p. 26). Turk's reflections regarding becoming a father consist of love for his child, but also a worry led by his racism and hate for others. This affects his joy, as he expects his child to be tainted by the multicultural society they live in. Turk Bauer's racist mindset contrasts with the ethical obligation humans feel according to Levinas' ethics of the Other. In "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation" Judith Butler states: "this is also, clearly, the condition of my injurability as well, and in this way my answerability and my injurability are bound up with one another. In other words, you may frighten me and threaten me, but my obligation to you must remain firm" (2012, p. 142). In Judith Butler's understanding of the other, in the bond between the self and the other, it does not matter if one is scared or threatened the awareness of the other with the obligation of care, respect, and recognition are

more important. The racist mindset, no matter how it is justified, should still be canceled by the awareness of the other.

Initially, Turk Bauer's actions are driven by anger and hate. His intent to sue Ruth is based on this anger and the need for revenge. "As far as I'm concerned, this is the memorial my son deserves: If I cannot have him back, I will make sure the people responsible for it are punished, and that others like them are left trembling with fear" (Picoult, 2016, p. 355). Not only does Turk seek revenge for himself, but he also wants to install fear in others in concordance with the hateful rhetoric present in supremacist groups. However, throughout the repercussions he develops some critical reflections regarding his role in the death of his baby. During the trial, Turk Bauer expresses uncertainty and regret in how his actions had played a role in the following tragedy:

I have been thinking about what Odette Lawton said: If I hadn't spoken out against the black nurse, would things have ended differently? Would she have tried to save Davis the minute she realized he wasn't breathing? Would she have treated him like any other critical patient, instead of wanting to hurt me like id hurt her? (Picoult, 2016, p. 417).

In this passage, Turk is able to reflect on the consequences of his actions, realizing that the hurt and anger he has imposed on Ruth might be the reason she did not try to save their baby. Turk being unaware of how Ruth tried to save the baby but was afraid of the consequences of admitting this. Ruth's fright of the repercussions of her touching the baby originates from the hate Turk demonstrated in their interactions. In reality, the behavior presented by the Bauer's prohibited Ruth from admitting to touching the baby, not actually doing so. Turk wrongfully assigns Ruth's assumed lack of resuscitation to her being spiteful or seeking revenge rather than the apprehension she felt due to the racist precedent the hospital had put on her. However, his reflections surrounding his role in what followed is an introduction to self-awareness and the ability to reflect upon the consequences of his beliefs. In trying to reflect upon Ruth's intentions he is unsure, which is natural in trying to understand the perspectives of others without the awareness of their internal self. Even when recognizing the Other and having respect for the other, there is room for misunderstanding. "Expressions does not consist in giving us the other's interiority. The other who expresses himself precisely does not give himself, and accordingly retains the freedom to lie" (Levinas, 1969, p. 202). Levinas' highlights the inherent distance between the self and the other. The transcendental awareness

of the other will still be based on the perception of the self, and compassion, empathy, and respect will be based on understanding and acceptance that the other is its own identity.

Through the trial, Turk is exposed to new information regarding both the death of his child and the supremacist family he has married into. These realizations are also vital parts of his development. Through new experiences, his mindset has shifted from hatred and anger to thoughtful. The justification of hate he had created based on deciding the intent of others weakens and Turk is forced to indulge in self-reflection. Ruth also feels anger and hate for the injustice the Bauer's have constructed. Meeting in the courtroom does not initiate interaction between the two of them. However, the presence of the other and the physically draining aspect of the trial establish a space where they reflect on themselves and the other. The two of them never reach an agreement or develop a relationship, but their interactions with each other launch an internal journey of development for both. Having to face uncomfortable truths, they are able to grow as human beings, and years later, when reunited, there is no sign of friendship, hate, or recollection of each other, but there is mutual understanding and respect due to the transformation they have undergone. "I wonder. But she doesn't ask if we have met before; she doesn't acknowledge our history. She just waits for me to say whatever it is I feel the need to say" (Picoult, 2016, p. 494). Turk acknowledges how Ruth dignifies the situation when they meet again. Turk's previous notion that her actions are based on hatred is proven wrong, and she is able to care for him as any other patient, regardless of whether she feels hate or anger towards him. Their limited and negative interactions are still the origin of the ethical obligation they feel for each other and for themselves to be free from the situation. Their awareness of the other and the struggle the other has experienced is the resource for both their growth and acceptance of the other, even when sharing no common ground with the other. This supports Levinas' claim about the transcendental connection human beings have with each other, as something that happens unconsciously. Their conflict has made them aware of each other, which creates a bond between them consisting of ethical obligations, compassion and awareness.

5 Comparison.

Small Great Things and *Disgrace* feature life-altering situations. Central to these life-altering situations are the ethical decisions endured by each character. Ruth, Turk, and David Lurie are all placed in compromising situations where they react based on their beliefs and mindsets. Through the novel, they experience and develop through interaction with others and develop new perspectives based on these experiences. Accusations and blame are central in both novels. The main difference between the novels is the setting and reaction to the accusations. These reactions differ based on privilege. The privilege, or lack of privilege, is fundamental to the need to act with grace and dignity. Where a lack of privilege forces Ruth to accept ignorant and racist treatment, to accept that others cannot or will not understand her needs, while David Lurie, refuses to acknowledge or understand that his actions have hurt others, and is bitter for how others react to this. The omission, or presence, of grace and dignity, or the development of grace, is due to the development of ethical awareness. Ethical awareness aligns with Levinas' theory of the other. Ruth has had to acknowledge and understand others through her circumstances, while David Lurie's self-centered manner does not need to acknowledge the needs of any other than himself. The notion that through interaction with others, human beings develop an innate ethical awareness that contains compassion, awareness, and understanding of others is present in *Small Great Things*. However, *Disgrace* illustrates how the lack of awareness of others and that privilege omits the ethical awareness of other beings.

5.1 Interaction with the Others.

Levinas' states that interaction with the other happens unconsciously. The acknowledgment of the other is transcendental in how it impacts human beings. The disgraceful acts by David Lurie are a testament to the opposite, as he does not seem to acknowledge or recognize the existential position of the needs have of others. In contrasts to the behavior of David Lurie, Ruth has lived a life where she has been cautious of the other, constantly considering the existence, and frequently the priority, of the other in how she lives her life. Privilege is one of the reasons why David Lurie can behave as he does. David's race, education, and upbringing have made him self-centered and used to discredit others. This privilege is the same as Kennedy has. The difference is that hers is less prominent, and her background has made it possible to be ignorant of the struggles of others, not to disregard them with intent. Their development separates them, as in how they change when realizing what privilege they have.

David Lurie decides he cannot change because of his instinctive self-centered behavior. His privilege has allowed him to create an ingrained sense of self-importance that makes him constantly ignore the needs of others. He states: "All right, I'll do it. But only as long as I don't have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself. I'll do it on that basis'" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 77) in this quote, David Lurie insists he will not change for the better or develop his understanding of others. David's claim that his being himself makes it impossible to be better is proof of his perceived ingrained identity. When Bev Shaw teases him for his tenacious drive to reject character development, she creates several possibilities for him to learn from her, where she allows him to interact with her to discover an understanding of the needs of others. Repeatedly, Bev Shaw tries to impact his steadfast mindset without any luck. His persistence to be who he is, selfish and ignorant, contrasts with how Kennedy undergoes change as her relationship with Ruth develops. Kennedy has to realize how she is and move away from what she perceives as correct to accustom Ruth.

No, I mean equity. Equality is treating everyone the same. But equity is taking differences into account, so everyone has a chance to succeed," I look at her. "The first one *sounds* fair. The second one *is* fair. Its equal to give a printed test to two kids. But if one's blind and one's sighted, that's not true. You ought to give one a braille test and one a printed test, which both cover the same material. All this time, I've been giving the jury a print test, because I didn't realize that they're blinds. That *I* was blind. (Picoult, 2016, p. 462)

This revelation from Kennedy does not only show how she has developed her beliefs and mindset through her interactions with Ruth. In addition, it shows how she, because of her newfound recognition of the struggles of others is willing to apologize. Both David Lurie and Kennedy have the possibility to learn something new from new relationships. However, only Kennedy can take this opportunity and develop her ethical awareness to acknowledge the needs of others. As opposed to Kennedy's realization, David Lurie is confused about the treatment he receives when trying to get revenge for the attack on Lucy. David Lurie refuses to show Lucy any understanding in her reaction. Lucy decides to act with grace and dignity, and David's refusal to accompany her is not helpful to anyone. Bev Shaw and Lucy try to explain to David how this is not his battle, but he develops more anger. Set in post-apartheid South Africa, his anger is fueled by racism. In contrast to Kennedy's realization, David Lurie acts with confusion and anger at the treatment he feels is unfair that he receives. In interaction

with Lucy, he refuses to accept her wishes to handle her attack. Lucy's decision to act with grace and dignity is shocking to David Lurie, and he refuses to accompany this. In conversations with Bev Shaw and Lucy, they try to make David aware. While Kennedy is embarrassed to realize how she has hurt Ruth, David gets more frustrated that Lucy disagrees with him and the anger he feels towards Petrus and the attacker. The anger David Lurie displays towards Petrus is almost a trial to get revenge for Lucy without hearing her or recognizing what she, as a being, needs.

Small Great Things and *Disgrace* present characters in development or in an unstable situation. The journey of the various characters differs based on how they withstand being faced by the challenges. The development of a friendship between Ruth and Kennedy is central to both their acknowledgment of others. Their conversations are central to their development of understanding for each other. Their conversations are also a source of grace for each other as their friendship develop, Ruth and Kennedy realize what they have not understood before, allowing Ruth to educate Kennedy as she has expressed an acknowledgment of everything she does not understand. In their discussions about race, Ruth offers Kennedy grace: "she falters, then gathers up the weeds of her thoughts and offers me the saddest, truest bouquet. "I didn't know." "Why *would* you?" I reply- not angry, not hurt, just stating a fact. "You'll never have to" (Picoult, 2016, p. 394). Ruth dignifies Kennedy in acknowledging how Kennedy does not have the predisposed cultural background to recognize the systematic racism in society, as she has not participated in it, only benefited from it. She is graceful in handling Kennedy's apology and the melancholy acknowledgment that there is no ill intent, only people being uninformed. Their friendship is crucial to conquering this lack of knowledge and fulfills the interaction and conscious awareness of others that is vital for recognizing their struggles, which encourages empathy and acknowledgment of the existence of others.

The difference in privilege is illustrated in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace*, through how the less privileged Ruth has had to be considerate of others. Her recognition of the needs of others is a result of the awareness she has had of others. In relation to the others, Ruth has felt an obligation to not be a burden or stereotype, which has evolved into an ethical awareness of the needs of others. The awareness Ruth has of the differences between herself and others allows her to act with grace when recognizing their needs. Ruth understands Kennedy, and to some extent the Bauers, and their shortcomings and accepts that their mindset is the reason for their actions. Ruth's ability to show grace is based on the ethical obligation she has to others and

the acknowledgment of their struggles. Kennedy in *Small Great Things* and David Lurie from *Disgrace* are both characters with privilege, David Lurie more so than Kennedy. In addition, David Lurie has no self-awareness, which results in his lack of recognition of his ethical obligation due to the rejection of interactions with others. Presented with opportunities to learn from his mistake, David Lurie chooses to be ignorant by ignoring the possibility of recognizing others, and being aware of their need for compassion and consideration. David Lurie's rejection of the other shows how acknowledgment of others and acceptance are graceful actions that portray the awareness the characters have developed of their ethical obligation to others.

5.2 Character development.

Small Great Things and *Disgrace* introduce characters facing accusations and scrutiny. While the characters work on solving their misfortune, their situations are unstable. Life changes present opportunities to change their mindset and beliefs and to develop as human beings. In their journey to solve their problems, all characters are introduced to new relationships. Their interactions with their new acquaintances foster character development as their relationships with new people align with their awareness of others and if they are willing to endure interaction and listen to others, achieving an ability to understand them better. David Lurie is ingrained with his mindset and is not willing to listen to those who aim to make him reflect upon his actions. When Bev Shaw tries to make him contemplate how he treats his daughter, he dismisses her: "Bev Shaw is silent. *Is there something about him that Bev Shaw can see and he cannot? Because animals trust her, should he trust her too, to teach him a lesson? Animals trust her, and she uses that trust to liquidate them. What is the lesson there?*" (Coetzee, 1999, p. 210). Bev Shaw tries to help David Lurie realize the errors of his ways, but he rejects her and her input by comparing the trust animals have for her with why he should not trust her. David Lurie uses this as an excuse to avoid self-examination. By discrediting everyone he surrounds himself with, he evades the opportunity to transcend in interaction with the other. His discredit of others is a testament to his self-centeredness and inability to show compassion for others. David Lurie is a character who does not have ethical awareness, and his actions do not align with the idea that human beings unconsciously have compassion and empathy towards others. Contradicting the notion that it is innate and cannot be rejected, as the mere presence of others fosters it.

Where David Lurie rejects interaction with others in *Disgrace*, interaction is central for Turk, Kennedy, and Ruth's development in *Small Great Things*. Regardless to what extent her background has affected Ruth, she has fought her entire life against the need to recognize the institutional racism in society. When Ruth gets accused of not trying to save the baby, she recognizes how differently she is treated from her white colleagues. The trial is an arena for Ruth to realize the consequences of racism that she previously rejected, and by recognizing them, she also realizes how much the effort she has put into ignoring it has affected her. Through the interaction and education of Kennedy, Ruth has to interact with her inner feelings about racism and injustice she has experienced. With her inclination to be ambitious and graceful she has ignored the pain racism has inserted in her. This accusation forces Ruth to reflect upon her own mindset and realize the importance of acknowledging her struggles and the struggles of her society.

I hear the flow of the fountain behind me, and I think about water, how it might rise above its station as mist, flirt at being a cloud, and return as rain. Would you call that falling? Or coming home? I don't know how long I stand there, weeping. Adisa comes to me, her shawl open like the great black wings of a heron. She wraps me in the feathers of unconditional love. (Picoult, 2016, p. 313)

Ruth realizes that her family and others who have experienced discrimination are the only ones who can ever understand her fully. In Ruth's attempt to be free from racism, she has disregarded her family and refuses to acknowledge how the hurt she has rejected impacts them as well. Ruth's realization is about herself rather than the needs of others, but it is through interaction with others that she becomes aware of her need for compassion and empathy. On the contrary, David Lurie's interactions with reflections regarding himself do not motivate development. His conclusion is opposite that of Ruth experience. In every situation he concludes that it is not he, himself, that is in the wrong, but rather, the circumstances are to blame. The same privilege that David has benefitted from is what he now uses as an explanation for his misfortune rather than taking accountability. Turk Bauer's stubborn self-centeredness can be compared to that of David Lurie. However, when met with misfortune, and after the anger has expired, Turk Bauer is forced to reflect upon his extremist views. The motivation behind the change is not any direct interaction with others, as his environment consists of people with the same beliefs, but the awareness of others still begins the unconscious transformation due to the acknowledgment of others. While David Lurie refuses to take any accountability for his mistakes, convinced that it is too late to change,

Turk Bauer starts over and leaves his hateful past to start a new life where he can acknowledge others and show grace.

She turns. For a moment, her eyes narrow the tiniest bit, and I wonder. I wonder. But she doesn't ask if we have met before; she doesn't acknowledge our history. She just waits for me to say whatever it is I feel the need to say (Picoult, 2016, p. 494).

Both Ruth and Turk use the death of the baby and its repercussions to develop their awareness of others. In the process, they become aware of themselves. Their awareness fosters the development of their ethical awareness and treatment of themselves and others. When reunited they show each other grace in not reminding each other of their past trauma. They both allow each other to forget and show compassion for each other for what they have been through. Central to the character development of Ruth and Turk is their interaction with others. Through their effort to understand others, they also develop their ability to recognize their own needs. Their trauma and past experiences start a process where they are aware of their ethical obligation to both others and themselves, which in turn develops their ability to show grace to others. For Ruth, showing grace to others is ingrained in her nature, stemming from her childhood. However, her development is mainly about allowing the same grace to herself. In creating an understanding and awareness of others, hate and anger towards others are diminished. This understanding of others facilitates Ruth to continue to act with grace. Interaction and understanding of others are also how Turk can put his extremist past behind him to start a new life with compassion for others. The awareness of the needs of others is supported by Levinas' theory of the others and his attention to face and close encounters. Judith Butler writes of how the face and interaction with the other reduce violence, in the preface to *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2020) : "he makes use of the "face" as a figure that communicates both the precariousness of life and the interdiction on violence" (xviii). The face represents both the beauty in diversity and recognizing others, as well as a prohibition to violence, as human beings cannot act violently towards someone while being aware of their value as beings. David Lurie does not behave violently as executing physical violence, but his self-centered manner and his egotistical behavior lead him to conduct actions that inflict pain in others. Lucy, Soraya, and Melanie all suffer under the acts of David Lurie. In his lack of recognition of others, he harms them by being ignorant of their needs. While both David and Turk Bauer have the ability to hurt others and have violent tendencies, Turk's character development allows him to learn to understand others while David Lurie continues his self-centered life. The novels illustrate the differences

between the growth prohibited in humans through interaction with others and acceptance of their perspectives.

6 Ethics and Literature in education.

Norwegian schools have a set of shared core values of education and learning that each school aims to fulfill and establish in their students with the education they receive. Education of specific subject as well as the overall aim of education in school comply with the core values. The core values in *LK2020* aim to unite Norwegian society and foster understanding and acceptance. Utdanningsdirektoratet states in their “Core Curriculum- core values of the education and training” that “these values, the foundation of our democracy, shall help us to live, learn, and work together in a complex world and with an uncertain future.” (2020a)

Living in a united and democratic society requires that inhabitants acknowledge each other and consequently share an ethical obligation as Levinas’ propose. "Equality is produced where the other commands the same and reveals himself to the same responsibility; otherwise it is but an abstract idea and a word" (Levinas, 1969, p. 214). Levinas explains that equality is established on a mutual relationship consisting of respect, responsibility, and compassion for each other. The mutual obligation Levinas treasure is stipulated in the *LK2020* and their core values that promote compassion for others as a measure of all-round development. Schools are a fundament of society, and teaching students to develop grace and dignity is crucial for being able to live, learn, and work together as compassionate and empathic towards each other. The core values are present through interactions between teachers and students, and are set for students to develop and learn how to interact with others to respect and learn how to handle tensions between different interests and views (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a). Based on their core values, *LK2020* aims to learn students’ conciliation based on awareness and dignity. In conveying others dignity, students accept the differences within society. The reasoning behind the importance of education on human dignity is stated in the "Core curriculum 1.1 Human dignity”:

Human beings are vulnerable and make mistakes. Forgiveness, charity and solidarity are necessary principles for the growth and development of human beings. Each person's convictions and principles must be taken seriously so that we can all think, believe and express ourselves freely. (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a, p. 5)

Norwegian schools recognize the differences between cultures and ethnicities existing within society. Considering the multicultural classroom, the *LK2020* aims to teach students to respect different cultures and learn from and about them so that its students develop the ability to offer dignity to all. One aim is to unite society based on the importance of

acceptance and solidarity. Central to uniting society are virtues closely aligned with offering grace to others. Being graceful towards others means that there is less conflict in society as its inhabitants aim to understand and accept others.

LK2020 aims to embrace the diversity in offering grace and dignity to all, supported by the values stated in the curriculum to ensure not only education but the all-round development. The all-round development fosters understanding, acceptance, and a sense of ethical obligation towards others that is central to ensuring conflict resolution and ensure a society where all voices belong. *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* provide insight to new perspective that provide students with an awareness of others through their perspectives on different cultures, beliefs, and mindsets. Closely aligned with awareness of others is the ethical obligation to them, developed through the acknowledgment of the various ways of life existing that establish empathy to others. The awareness of others combined with the ethical obligation it releases allows for a united society where its members will make informed decisions, not only to benefit themselves but the needs of others. Great literature, as Morson (2013, p. 207) argues, offers a unique medium to engage with the other, and to foster grace and dignity in the all-round development of students in upper secondary schools.

6.1 Literature and all-round development.

Literature provides insight and ideas beyond the stories they express. *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* are set in the US and South Africa and tell the stories of characters faced with racial tension, institutional racism, and gender inequality. Being set in South Africa, *Disgrace* portrays the cultural changes following apartheid and the refusal to accept the change following the abolition of apartheid. *Small Great Things* is set in the United States and is a lesson in overcoming racism and ignorance, both in society and within oneself. The various points of view in gender and social settings allow the two novels to provide insight into mindsets across the globe. They can emphasize and show readers the various sides of life through their settings and entertain through their diversity and relatability. Students are able to develop their empathy by the understanding of new cultures and conflicts provided from the stories. “When one reads a novel, one identifies with characters” (Morson, 2013, p. 208) the value of literature is beyond the aesthetic value it presents and in the ability to convey new perspectives through written words. The aesthetics of literature allow for the portrayal of images created by words, and these images convey cultures and perspectives unattainable by

mere instruction. In the developing process literature provides readers with reflections on society and self.

The all-round education fostered by reading literature such as *Disgrace* and *Small Great Things*, is vital for the ability to make informed decisions. Beyond being introduced to new ideas, perspectives, and cultures, it provides readers with a tool to understand them. New acknowledgement and understanding of ideas, perspectives and cultures make it possible to learn to make decisions with comprehension to others. As an art form, literature provides an intake of knowledge through impressions and thoughts, and because of this, there is no way to measure directly how it affects the mind and decisions made. Simon Stow however, indicates the power of literature in “Reading Our Way to Democracy? Literature and Public Ethics”:

Reversing Immanuel Kant’s well known observation on the common saying that what might be true in theory is not necessarily true in practice, it might be argued that the connection between literature, public ethics and democracy is true in practice, but not true in theory, for there does seem to be something intuitively and phenomenologically appealing about the claim that literature can expand our moral imaginations in ways that might indeed be useful to liberal-democratic societies. Novels can and do lead us to think differently about our lives and relationships. (Stow, 2006, p. 416)

Novels, literature, and art are sources of reflections, and these reflections allow readers to understand new perspectives and accept other views. The idea that literature cannot expand our moral imaginations does not align with how totalitarian societies censor literature or the historic book burnings to prohibit members of the society to receive input and ideas through literature. The fear that literature can and will expand the moral imaginations, and by admission their understanding of others which is a testament to its value in all-round development, the education of ethical obligation, empathy, and awareness. The effect of literature is due to the insight to new beliefs that allows human beings to develop their understanding and acceptance of others as the core values of education aims to do. The core-values of Norwegian education aim at making their students both democratic participating members of society as well as able to make decisions that benefit them and society as a whole. The all-round development aims to make students compassionate and open to new cultures, and being equipped with insight to various cultures is a crucial element to attain this understanding. Exposure to new beliefs allows readers to understand the person behind them and learn to recognize and value that all beings have reasons behind their actions. *Disgrace*

and *Small Great Things* provide powerful aesthetic sources to consider ethical dilemmas in relations with the other. They can also contribute considerable to the aims of *LK2020* for upper and lower secondary schools.

Students develop through engaging with compelling and complex imaginations that lead to an examination of society and culture. Exposure to new thoughts and ideas is vital to development and existence. Without evaluation and reflection, there would be no moral beings. The beauty of literature is how the aesthetic value fosters discussions and development. Literature is not only art due to the structure of language but the meaning behind it and the ability to interpret it to learn. “Aesthetic value emanates from the struggle between texts: in the reader, in language, in the classroom, in arguments within a society” (Bloom, 1994, p. 38) the struggle between texts creates citizenship in human beings who wish to understand and decipher meaning from it. There is a common understanding, a fellowship in discussing the intent in literature. Literature gives meaning to the mundane and establishes intent to every day, which gives meaning to living and participating in society. The contemplation of what one's intent is manifested through our experiences and develops our moral imaginations beyond the sphere we surround ourselves with. Literature creates an environment to interact with others different from us. “The relationship with the Other is not produced outside of the world, but puts in question the world possessed” (Levinas, 1969, p. 173). These interactions that potentially change our understanding of the world do not occur in isolation but through lived experiences and literature provide an opportunity to add more experiences through the perspectives presented. The awareness developed through exposed experiences accompanied by lived experiences provides opportunities to open up new perspectives. This understanding of others' experiences is provided by the meaning found in the text and the acquiring of new perspectives that make students able to understand the perspectives of others, making literature a viable tool to keep developing their understanding of others and accepting various perspectives of citizens in society.

6.1.1 Interdisciplinary subjects and literature.

Literature is a tool to teach and educate students to ensure their all-round development because it facilitates the development of new thoughts and moral imaginations. The core values of education consist of topics such as human dignity, critical thinking and ethical awareness, and identity and cultural awareness. The education of this competency is assigned to each subject in addition to the interdisciplinary subjects; “health and life skills” and

“democracy and citizenship”. These subjects establish the development of all-round education of students. The curriculum for Health and life skills states that “other issues that come under this topic are value choices and the importance of meaning in life and relations with others, the ability to draw boundaries and to respect others’ boundaries, and the ability to deal with thoughts, feelings and relationships” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a, p. 16). Education of health and life skills aims to educate students in being ethical beings with a sense of obligation to others. In this acknowledgment of others, there is an acceptance of their views. *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* provides an opportunity to engage students in the mindsets of others and promote acceptance and empathy, which provide quality of life for self and others, in addition to the importance of expanding the quality of life through reducing hatred. The benefit of shifting from hateful perspectives is seen in the novels, Turk, Ruth, and Lucy all endure character development that reduce their anger and hatred. The interdisciplinary subject of Democracy and citizenship states that students “shall train their ability to think critically, learn to deal with conflicts of opinion and respect disagreement” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020a, p. 16). This competence is connected to making informed decisions and participating in the democratic process but is also related to ethical awareness as it promotes critical thinking and acceptance of diversity. Reading about ethical dilemmas offers an imaginative dimension of ethical considerations and provides a unique possibility to explore the life of the other. *LK2020*, like literature and Levinas, supports the importance of ethical awareness and claims that interaction with others awakens an innate obligation to each other. The value of introducing students to interact with new cultures, ideas, and perspectives fosters ethical obligation to others through awareness and transforms students from self-centered perspectives to understanding and accepting as proposed by Levinas. The core values aim to teach students not only to accept differences in opinions but to explore and understand them and their reasoning and therefore need to be aware of the opinions and justification of others.

The interdisciplinary subjects are core principles of Norwegian education and use varied methods to foster the development of “health and life skills” and “democracy and citizenship”. The moral imagination provided by literature makes it a tool in the education of awareness, critical thinking, and compassion are all crucial in the curriculum of interdisciplinary subjects. The possible use of literature to develop understanding and acceptance is stated by Mark Kingwell in “The Ethics of Ethics and Literature”: “reading a novel is the blessed burden of consciousness in action, two hopeful-monster souls communing

via text, the evolutionary miracle of language enjoying one of its highest expressions” (2014, p. 26). Literature creates novels and stories that evoke shock, empathy, or disgust expressed through the text, making it interpretable for students. The emotions awakened from literature are an opportunity to reflect and discuss both the actions of others and selves. *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* show growth and lack of growth in characters, which makes them tools for self-reflection and awareness of others, and enduring change as the benefits of accepting oneself as others is demonstrated in the novels. Reflection on characters' behavior fosters ethical awareness, as students admire or detest how characters from the novel behave.

6.2 *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* in Education.

Choosing to read *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* in school would be supported by the aim to educate students on the interdisciplinary subjects that facilitates all-round development. The novels would specifically present discussions on beliefs and mindset due to their ethical aspects in the conflict they contain. Reflections on showing grace and dignity to others facilitate a society where conflict resolution is based on understanding rather than fighting. Educating students to be moral beings is guiding them to reflect upon their understanding of society and others, and education in school should aim to foster ethical awareness. “Moral instruction is thus much more like a conversation than it is like an algorithm” (Kingwell, 2014, p. 26). Facilitating an environment where students can develop into moral and ethical beings is more of a measure in aim of the all-round development than lessons of instruction. Using the new perspectives the novel provides to discuss and reflect on is helpful in all-round development, especially being critical, informed, and understanding of the opinions of others. In discussions surrounding ethics and morals, students will develop their abilities to think and reflect upon other perspectives, as provided from the various characters, with new and different perspectives. *Disgrace* and *Small Great Things* feature accusations and ethical dilemmas in variations that are useful as a framework for discussions of right and wrong to foster all-round development.

The use of novels to develop students' engagement with new perspectives needs to be supported by tasks and activities that engage with the material to foster reflections regarding the ethical dilemmas, and the conflicts present in the stories to develop the ethical awareness of students. In engaging with literature, through discussing the contents, students recognize both their own and other perspectives essential to further develop these virtues by acknowledging grace and dignity in others. The presence of grace in literature makes students

able to recognize the ability to change and develop through observing the development of characters through interaction with others. The benefits and progress of characters are a testament to how human interaction can teach us about the struggles that others experience to further understand the obligation human beings have to each other. Assessing the literature is important as stated by Gary Soul Morson in “Novelistic Empathy, and How to Teach it”: “one cannot just direct attention to the text, because empathy is not a feature of the text, but of readers` interaction with it. It is part of the *work*” (2013, p. 213). There are various ways to engage with the insight that literature provides, but doing so is crucial to use the moral imagination fostered by reading.

Both *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* have the potential to spark engaging discussions due to the complex moral dilemmas in the accusations Ruth and David Lurie encounter. Affected by the society they live in, both David Lurie and Ruth must decide to persevere when confronted with change. Ruth realizes her needs, and David Lurie needs to let go of his privilege. Ruth has to endure a racist dilemma and further decide if she can continue to be ignorant of the racism she experiences every day. David Lurie is on the other side of change and has to give in to the changes in South African society to develop alongside society. The novels provide a source to new and different perspectives, as they vary in gender, social class, cultural context, and background, and with these encourage students and readers to reflect upon these elements and mindsets. The mindsets and personalities in the novels vary because of life experiences and end in some development fostered by the ethical dilemmas the characters endure. The development of characters, as well as the reactions, consequences, and hurt they inflict are all viable tools for reflections concerning ethical obligation and awareness of others. The illustrated morals of the characters create a foundation to discuss the moral decisions they make both in disgrace and honor. The grace and dignity they grant, or refuse, others are thought-provoking as students in development can reflect upon what they would do in the same situation. Each character's decisions are justified based on their beliefs, and recognizing their reasoning is crucial to resolving conflict healthily. While reading about the moral and ethical convictions of the characters, students will withhold judgment and reflect upon how they would act in the same situation while the consequences are evident. Reading about dilemmas fosters an environment where they can debate them, furthering the development of the ability to think critically, with empathy and ethical awareness as valued in *LK2020*.

The interdisciplinary subjects are a significant part of education and training for students to acquire the core values. The core values should further be included and present in all subjects, beyond the education of subject-specific competence aims, as the education aims to foster all-round development and life skills throughout the various subjects in school. Including lessons and material that works as measures to develop these values and principles of education in all subjects are encouraged. The use of *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* in school would benefit both all-round development, education of interdisciplinary skills and further develop English skills. The main aim of the lessons based on ethical awareness, grace, and dignity would be the development of life skills that benefit all-round development in combination with the use of English novels to develop the language skills of students. The curriculum for English after year one in Norwegian upper secondary states that students should be able to: “read, analyse and interpret fictional text in English” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b, p. 12). The English curriculum aims to educate its students on how to interpret English literature, where analyzing reasoning and beliefs behind actions would be a fitting tool to develop these skills. Norwegian students are required to read and analyze text in English, and using the material read to foster all-round development benefits both English education and all-round development. The ethical dilemmas of *Disgrace* and *Small Great Things* contribute to developing the student’s empathy, dignity, and literary competence.

6.2.1 Education on ethics.

Lessons constructed to teach and develop empathy, ethical awareness, and compassion should not provide an answer but rather focus on the process of reflections and considerations. Teachers should establish an environment where students know how to express their opinions, justify them, and consider the consequences in the process. In “Teaching Moral Philosophy Using Novels: Issues and Strategies” Abdelkader Auodjit states: “their role is to guide thinking, not to provide final answers” (2012, p. 63) on the teacher’s role in students’ development of empathy. The aim of the lessons should be to evoke self-reflection and reflection on society. Fostering reflection can be done by several methods of instruction based on the idea that the students have to read the stories and combine them with critical thinking on the ethical dilemma it promotes. Here are a few approaches to consider:

One method that constitutes discussions and further work with the literature read would be Socratic dialogue, where participants engage in back-and-forth discussions of questions and reasoning on an ethical dilemma. To work with Socratic dialogue and literature there needs to

be a form of focused discussion where the teacher has prepared some questions beforehand to ensure that the discussions are concentrated on grace, ethics, awareness of others and other crucial themes from the novels. “Socratic questioning is systematic, disciplined and deep and usually focuses on foundational concepts, principles, theories, issues or problems” (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. 35). Socratic dialogue fosters engaging discussions that develop ideas, and understanding, and by preparing questions related to *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace*, the discussions can be concentrated on developing specific virtues related to the novels or reflect on central themes such as empathy and development. The observations of perspectives provided by literature ensures that the students have established reflections on the material, and the discussion becomes a tool to convey their ideas and perception of the book.

Another possible method to use is to have students work on assessing their ideas on the novel in writing a book review. Students can state what the themes of the novel are, how and why these are the themes, and justify why this is important. In writing a review, the students can develop their arguments further by refining their ideas, and the justification ensures reflection on themes by the depiction of them. The injustice present in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* is more noticeable when trying to voice the themes of the novels as students need to experience them to point them out. “Because much literature is often more in tune with real life than theory and because it appeals to the imagination and emotions of readers, it evokes a deeper response in students than theory alone does” (Aoudjit, 2012, p. 53). The stories in the novel are a source of relatability, something student can somewhat recognize from their life fostering the ability to judge characters and conflicts to reflect upon the ethics present in the novel.

In the same vein, students can specify their thought on different perspectives, further by reviewing characters to reflect upon their actions. As the novels portray various characters with different struggles, and reactions to their conflicts, their personality is as viable for a review as the novel. It is easy to establish an attitude towards a character, as characters contain traits that students can be familiar with, making it easier to engage with their actions. “Students need not just to learn about empathy but also engage in it and recognize themselves engaging in it, as they read” (Morson, 2013, p. 214), in writing a review students need to justify these judgments and recognize the character's reasoning. Simply stating why you like or dislike a character is a task where students can reflect upon behavior and recognize their own behavior in the characters. Reviewing a character is a task that fosters reflections on ethics and is also an opportunity for self-reflection.

Another viable option is trying to understand their beliefs and mindset which can be beneficial in education of all-round development. A writing task where students are to imagine being the characters would provide an opportunity to work with our understanding of others. “As the character's emotion alters in the course of thinking, readers can trace its evolution. They are present, feeling along with the character, in a way possible in any other discipline or cultural artifact” (Morson, 2013, p. 208). Reading is a unique opportunity to gather full insight into the minds of others, and trying to understand how and why their background shapes their beliefs and perspectives is educational in understanding others. In trying to imagine being someone else, their experiences, perspectives, and beliefs shape the decisions they make, and imagining someone else background requires that students exclude their own beliefs to convey those of their character. Writing from someone else point of view is training in understanding others and in accepting others.

Alternatively, students can be separated from their own beliefs and perspectives to make it easier to relate to and accept the premises of the novels. By creating a role-play of the novel, students are to, some extent, able to experience how the fictional characters feel. Literature is an opportunity to participate in a different world and experience how it is to be a different sex, social class, or experience a lack or increase in social rights. It is easier to engage with the dilemmas presented in the novel and the injustice the characters experience when forced to play it out. “Their voices and perspectives on life come to live within them” (Morson, 2013, p. 216) the fictional characters become real through the role-play of their story, and their struggles and losses feel even more real. This establishes a deeper understanding of the pain of the characters. Students can experience either playing a position of less privilege or playing out the hurtful treatment of others, which can evoke a sense of ethical obligation to others, as well as recognizing others as people. Role-playing is direct engagement with the novels, and in playing out the story, students actively experience the story, both good and bad.

These are all methods to use literature to train students' empathy towards others. They combine the use of stories with discussions, reflections, and familiarity with the characters to further develop ethical awareness and compassion. However, the following lesson plan makes use of writing an essay from different characters' points of view to combine the element of recognizing emotions that role-playing provides with the reflection from trying to understand the perspectives of others fostered by imagining to be someone else, different to us to make use of the unique features of literature. This lesson combines two aspects of developing empathy, respect and understanding of others that is vital for all-round development.

6.2.2 Lesson plan.

A lesson plan based on trying to imagine someone else's point of view is a lesson that ensures working with the novels to develop insight beyond the mere intake of literature, as well as a method to rehearse de-centering selves crucial to develop our ethical obligation to others. The lessons will eventually lead to a writing assignment where students will produce an essay. The characters students are to imagine being all have their own experiences different from their selves. In this project, students would imagine being either Turk Bauer or David Lurie, two characters that, to some extent, lack awareness of others and have caused harm to others. Students would imagine being Turk or David in writing an apology to Ruth or Melanie for the hurt they have inflicted on them. The assignment fosters reflections surrounding regret, empathy, and awareness of others. And takes advantage of the different cultural, gendered, and social perspectives provided in the novels. In writing out the character's shortcomings, students would develop a moral imagination of how to be empathic and kind and how an apology acknowledges the ethical obligation humans have to each other to do better. In reflecting upon possible regret and behavior students would work with empathy to others and recognize where hurtful actions can originate from. To ensure that all students can follow the lesson plan, the premises have to be planned accordingly based on number of pages students should read, the time period allotted for the project, the aim of the lessons, and the evaluation criteria.

The lesson plan for this project would need to designate appropriate amount of time to cover both the reading portion and the writing portion of the project. Teachers need to be mindful of distributing the number of pages students need to read from each book, to ensure that students can read it in class. In upper secondary there are 140 hours of English classes distributed over the year (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020b), which amounts to 2,5 hours of English a week assigned to 2 classes each week. The task asks students to imagine being David Lurie or Turk Bauer, two characters whose perspectives readers are introduced to in the *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace*. For David Lurie his apology would go to Melanie, to apologize for taking advantage of her and making advances at her, making her withdraw from class. To understand the context of the situation, students would need to read chapters 2 to 6, which cover the affair, from David's attempt to seduce Melanie to his hearing about their relationship. The chapters combined consist of 48 pages, making it possible to read in a week of English lessons with support and reading strategies provided by the teacher. Working with *Small Great Things* and Turk Bauer, students would write an apology to Ruth for the hateful and

discriminating command. To gain understanding of both Turk Bauer's justification of actions and Ruth's reactions students would need to read several sections from the novel, pages 25 to 77, to gain insight into Turk's reasoning behind Ruth not being allowed to touch the baby, pages 88 to 144 to gain insight to Ruth's reaction to the accusation, and lastly, pages 491 to 494 to experience Turk's development. The combined sections consist of 113 pages, possibly needing six classes, 7, 5 hours, to get through the reading. For both novels, writing the essay of the apology would need less time allocated in school, using two classes, 2,5 hours, to write the papers. Using less time to write the apologies in class would be possible due to the support and reading strategies that allow students to engage with the contents and context of the novels while in the process of reading making the contents easier to comprehend and follow along in the reading process. To ensure progress teachers need to prepare students on targets and check points students should reach for each class. These will be mandatory reach to ensure that all students have the same insight to the same material when starting the writing process.

Reading the two chosen excerpts would demand most of the time at school due to the varying reading skills, and to ensure all students are able to read the pages necessary.

Each student's reading skills will vary based on previous experiences, and to ensure all students get to complete the assignment, it is vital to eliminate the varying degrees of reading skills. In addition, motivation is crucial to the success of the lesson

plan. "Students' motivation to read will be influenced by their reading skills and previous reading experiences" (Carlsen, 2020, p. 211). To help make the reading portion of the lesson plan without discrepancy between students, teachers should aim to use reading strategies to help all students stay connected to the material and engage with it throughout the period.

Before starting to read, teachers should inform the students about what they can expect to make the literature more accessible to all. "Texts should be made accessible to all students by unpacking the structure and content before reading" (Tishakov, 2020, p. 189). Priming the students to take in the contents of the story by providing one class before the reading portion starts to let students get familiar with background information, context to the story, and the task they are to complete before students start the reading would be beneficial in combination with joint reading exercises where teachers check in on the process, adds additional information when necessary and sets accessible goals for where students should be at the end of lessons (Tishakov, 2020, p. 182). Allotting time in class to read makes it possible for students to receive support in the reading process both from their peers and teacher by reading

together, or collectively while discussing the material, and sections of the novel together. Reading in a controlled environment ensures that all students have the same perceived idea of the novel. In addition, it makes it possible to further the joint reading by varying between students reading for themselves and reading aloud. Reading aloud could be an alternative for those struggling with reading to ensure that all students receive the same input. Audiobooks can suggest another alternative to vary the methods of reading aloud or reading self to ensure students struggling to read can work with and listen to the novels on their own. Providing alternatives to mere reading is necessary and beneficial as the aim is to initiate meditation upon ethical dilemmas of the other, which can be done by audiobooks too.

The aim of the lesson plans is to learn from the insight and perspective on life that literature provides and using this insight to learn to decenter the self, developing and establishing an ethical obligation towards others. Further the aim of the task consists of the introduction to new cultures, background, and information, and is a tool to train the understanding of other perspectives. Turk Bauer and David Lurie both have tendencies to not acknowledge others, either by ignorance or with intent fostered by hate. In writing out an apology students would reflect upon how and why the characters fail to recognize others, and they will reflect upon how their character have hurt others. The understanding of how behavior has inflicted harm transpires when students try to apologize for it and especially when constructing the writing in an essay. Students will have to separate between the justification characters present in the novel, to convey an imagined situation where the characters recognize their hurtful actions in taking accountability. The apology trains student to take accountability and illustrate what the potential development of empathy would look like in trying to acknowledge others, training their moral imaginations of self-centered characters that develop an ethical obligation to others in an attempt to teach students to decenter themselves. In addition, they learn to recognize the hurt other, less privileged characters experience, which sustains empathy and ethical obligation to others. “The other person has “an equivalent of self” much like our own”(Morson, 2013, p. 213). Decentering ourselves and making room to understand others is educational in teaching students to accept and acknowledge the needs of others and learn from the possible development that characters corroborating with Levinas’ perspective on awareness of others experience.

Evaluating the responsibility, compassion, or the ability to show grace and dignity in the written apology aligns with the importance of maintaining education of the core values and principles in subjects beyond the subject-specific curriculum. To keep developing awareness,

compassion, and empathy it is crucial to include evaluation of these abilities in addition to general assessment of language in English education.

The ultimate objective of learning and instruction in the Norwegian school system is the development of the students' overall competence. Therefore, it is important that teachers do not lose sight of the overall purpose of the subject, the core elements, the cross-curricular themes and the basic skills when assessing student learning and student performance. (Bøhn, 2020, p. 308)

As stated by Henrik Bøhn in "General perspectives on assessment" the ultimate aim of Norwegian education is the development of overall competence, including the all-round development and creating assignments that combine subject specific aims, such as reading and all-round development fosters both language skills and being moral beings. Teachers should therefore make an assessment of the responsibility, empathy and compassion students portray in their assignments. Developing an assignment where students are to show grace, dignity and awareness of other is a vital tool to educate and train these abilities, and in evaluating their ability to so that it can further foster students' ethical awareness and all-round development.

The evaluation of the assignment can further mediate all-round development by emphasizing these qualities in the apology, as well as including students' perspectives in developing evaluation criteria. In including students in making assessment criteria, students need to decide what is essential in a well-written apology and how these features of an apology should look. To further examine the student's understanding of the task and what they should focus on, students can participate in developing the evaluation criteria for the task:

However, in line with the LK20 curriculum's focus on exploration and reflection, it is usually a very good idea to involve students in developing the criteria. To do this, the teacher should start by presenting the learning goal(s) and the task(s), and then ask the students to brainstorm which given criteria should be applied in the assessment of performance of the given task. (Bøhn, 2020, p. 315)

The benefit of having students participate in creating the criteria is that it further fosters reflection on the task, as the students themselves are able to decide what elements are important, and why these elements are important. However, the teacher should ensure some general criteria that students should follow to ensure that students have reached the

competence the lessons aimed to develop. In working with developing ethical awareness, understanding of new cultures, insight into other perspectives, and empathy will correlate to evaluate if the assignments align with the task, and answer what the task has asked them to do in writing an apology for self-centered and hurtful behavior. In general, the text is evaluated based on its qualities as a written product, decided by students and teacher. Teachers can make an assessment and evaluate the written product based on the competence aim of writing and producing text, and the ability to analyze literature, which in this task would be detrimental to being able to convey the perspectives of someone else. Teachers should evaluate if the students are able to take on the perspectives of someone new to them and show empathy towards others, both in writing graceful apologies based on the imagined or real character development and in offering dignity to those marginalized in the novels, like Melanie and Ruth are.

The aims and contents of the assignment align with the interdisciplinary subjects and aim to further the understanding of literature, the concern for the other and the all-round development by making students aware of others and their needs. Specific criteria related to the apology essay would be to evaluate the ability to show consideration to the person hurt, accountability for hurtful actions, and how the students recognize the needs of others. These core elements of the apology would illustrate how students portray the imaginative actions as wrong and how one can be aware of others and recognize why and how the privilege and background of the characters have affected their mindset. The evaluation would be a criterion-referenced assessment where students would receive pre-made criteria and be evaluated on their ability to fulfill these (Bøhn, 2020, p. 307). For the apology essay, the evaluation criteria would consist of statements about the essay and the ethical awareness presented in the essay. Examples of statements would be: “the apology essay reflects upon the wrongdoings and shows an ability to understand both sides”, “the essay recognizes the hurt inflicted in others” or “the essay comments upon how background has shaped the characters perspectives.” All these statements highlight one aim of the essay and can be done in varying degrees, affecting the result of the paper. Students will receive a grade, or a measurement of competence evaluated by their success in including and portraying their competence as represented by the statements in the evaluation criteria. By assessing their ability to convey core parts of the apology, vital to acknowledging the other, teachers and the student itself are able to recognize how much empathy, compassion, and reflections students have rendered.

The criteria used in the evaluation of the task consist of three main statements that each measure a component of compassion for others and recognizing the perspectives of others. The first statement: “the apology essay reflects upon the wrongdoing and shows an ability to understand both sides” shows students' ability to understand others and recognize how actions can inflict hurt on others. This understanding of the needs of others develops through decentering the self and understanding how others think and feel. Further, in taking accountability, it trains students to conciliation. These virtues and traits are central to all-round development which is shown in their ability to recognize both sides as a measure to come together to understand each other. The second statement: “the essay recognizes the hurt inflicted in others” measures the student`s ability to show compassion and empathy to others. Accomplishing a high evaluation on this criterion happens when students recognize the hurt of the other, training their awareness of the ethical obligation humans have and their ability to show dignity to others. The statement promotes accountability, which is a crucial part of being a moral being and a citizen in society. The last statement: “the essay comments upon how background has shaped the perspectives of the characters” is a measurement of what insight the students have obtained and a portrayal of grace. The criteria measure how the perspectives provided in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* shape students’ awareness of others. Further, they illustrate the respect students have for the various perspectives presented, as they need to be graceful towards the characters based on their own internal conflicts or cultural heritage.

All statements used to evaluate the apologies depend on the ability to show empathy. The criteria revolve around the empathic virtues students show in their ability and their awareness of the other, the marginalized character they have hurt. By basing the evaluation on their ability to portray compassion, respect, and accountability students are assessed on characteristics aligned with grace and dignity, further portraying ability to accept others as the character they have portrayed. In writing their apologies, accepting wrongdoing, recognizing the hurt they have inflicted, and reflecting upon their mindset and beliefs the students can develop their characters through writing. Their ability to evolve characters is a testament to an opportunity to evaluate the ethical obligation students feel and should have developed based on the compassion and empathy they establish when reading novels. Criterion-referencing the apology essays shows students how far they have come in their all-round development, acknowledging others and developing ethical awareness. The ethical awareness students show in their apologies aligns with Levinas idea of the face; “the epiphany of the face is ethical”

(Levinas, 1969, p. 199) which depicts how the awareness of others awakens the ethical compassion and responsibility for others. The importance of the ethical awareness of others, based on respect and dignity, is as also mentioned in the *LK2020* core curriculum as a vital part of all-round development, the development of compassion for others. This compassion for others is crucial to being citizens of society and allows students to know what and how they can further develop their all-round development.

7 Conclusion.

Literature is a tool to perceive, understand, and accept new cultures and perspectives. Reading novels allows readers to inhabit a different society, gender, a different social class, or a new period. This ability to visit imaginative realities fosters moral imaginations where readers recognize these realities different to what they know. This insight is vital to understanding new perspectives, and students can develop their empathy, compassion, and responsibility through interacting with literature. Using literature in school to develop ethical awareness aligns with Levinas idea of the ethical obligation humans have to each other in innate responsibility for each other (Levinas, 1969, p. 215), as well as the core values in *LK2020* based on the possibilities to foster all-round development as it can provide reflection, compassion, and awareness all virtues closely aligned with grace. With their ethics and morals, *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* are novels that foster reflections on behavior and attitudes, and in identifying graceful actions, the benefit of these actions can be trained by readers. The novels are a portrayal of racial and gendered issues based on their setting, which is vital to learn and understand different cultures and its inhabitants.

Buganza (2012) introduce the relationship between development of empathy and literature, as readers endure moral education and awareness through reading literature, Reichman (2006) supports this idea by his reflections surrounding the development of empathy that transpires while reading based on the opportunity to withhold judgement and experience consequences of actions. They share the belief that literature provides readers with insight and understanding. This insight is not limited to the cultures and settings they present but a mere awareness of the emotions, reactions, and behavior, the awareness of others. The interaction with others that happens through literature transforms readers and students into moral beings, obligated to take the needs of others into consideration. Through awareness of others, their struggles and their pain students develop their empathy. The insight into the lives of various characters promotes empathy and compassion for their lives, further fostering the obligation and recognition of others. The development of empathy and awareness of others allows readers to learn and train their ability to recognize grace and dignity, as well as offer it back. When reading, one can withhold judgment until the complete story has been presented, providing readers with a full understanding of the reasons behind actions and behavior which fosters an understanding of others (Reichman, 2006, p. 297). Developing an understanding other fosters compassion and grace to accept differences which is beneficial in conflict resolution and as an aim to unite people together. In being aware of differences and

differences within perspectives students develop the ethical awareness of others fostering compassion and empathy. Literature serves as a vital tool in this process, as it provides readers with nuanced insights into mindsets and beliefs.

The literary review of *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* reveals grace and dignity in characters, conflict resolution, and interactions between characters. The novels display of grace and dignity illustrate how characters from different genders, backgrounds and privileges are able to connect and interact with each other in a meaningful way that impacts the characters and their mindsets. Grace and dignity are present in situations where characters are faced with ethical dilemmas or complex moral appraisals to make. In *Small Great Things*, Turk Bauer develops from his hating and supremacist views into a loving father who has moved past his racist past. This development is due to his awareness of others, and readers are able to recognize his breakthrough when faced with and introduced to new perspectives. Ruth and Kennedy transform their perspectives on race and privilege when introduced to each other and forced to endure Ruth's trial together. They are all characters that are proof of the benefit of human interaction to seek to understand others, aligned with Levinas' ideas of The Other and the Face in *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas, 1969). Reading *Small Great Things* is an insight into several perspectives, and focusing on the hateful, supremacist Turk Bauer when reading the novel fosters insight into a new perspective, different and unique than most. The uniqueness of Turk's hateful rhetoric and opinions is explored in writing an apology from his point of view. Students will show and experience his lack of awareness of others. Through reading and working with the novel students will train their awareness of others based on the idea that the characters develop compassion for each other through experiencing their hurt and pain. Their interaction with literature develops into an ethical obligation and empathy for each other. In *Small Great Things* this is seen in the grace and dignity from Ruth, when she offers Turk a graceful environment that allows him to keep his dignity regardless of his past. Ruth's willingness to conciliate is a testament to the idea that grace is a beneficial response to injustice. Ruth responds to the injustice she has previously experienced with offering grace to those who need it, which is a tool to foster conciliation rather than retaliation based on Sells et al. (2009) notion that consolation benefits from grace rather than pain and conflict.

On the other side, literature promotes characters such as David Lurie without the intent to recognize or acknowledge others. *Disgrace* does not follow his character development as much as it follows his reflections surrounding his life and justifications of why he does not need to change. However, his friends and family continuously offer him grace and dignity for

his ignorant behavior. They keep giving him chances to do better and make better decisions, acknowledging and somewhat accepting of David Lurie's shortcomings. Throughout the novel, David Lurie receives support and friendliness from his daughter, and colleagues that all want him to make better decisions and try to guide him into these. Both his daughter, ex-wife and colleagues advise him to apologize and take accountability in his hearing. Further, his daughter tries to express her opinions to Lurie several times, hoping that he will become aware of her needs. However, in his self-centered manner, David Lurie does not recognize the support and grace he receives. Rather David Lurie is convinced that he is unfairly treated regarding, in his delusional perspectives on relations which further makes him neglect his awareness of other and subsequently the possibility for conciliation. Both *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* portray grace and dignity in characters. Each novel portrays graceful actions that offer dignity to others based on their interactions with others, which provide them with understanding, awareness, and acceptance for being themselves and disgraceful actions, making readers perceive judgement and develop empathy.

The character development and interaction between characters in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* can be used in the education of ethics and empathy to develop and train students' ability to accept others. The acceptance of others is established on a fundamental understanding of the person and that the other person is different from the self. Acceptance of others is constituted by understanding, which is associated with Levinas and the ethics of the other. In interaction with others, humans transcend beyond their egotistical past and become aware of others (Levinas, 1969, p. 193). This transformation happens to characters in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* and can be used as an inspiration in reading about the outcome of characters. In addition to the interaction with literature to make students aware of others and characters that are different from those existing in proximity. Both reading about and experiencing the ethical obligation set in the novels and the empathy developed through interaction with literature develop the innate ethical awareness. In developing empathy and awareness of others, students learn to take others into account before prioritizing themselves, which is a core value of the Norwegian education stated in the *LK2020*.

The importance of being aware of the other is its presence throughout life. Establishing a mutual responsibility for others and an openness to others is vital in a united society. Using literature to interact with others, as valued by Levinas and *LK2020*, relies on an innate ethical obligation to understand and protect others. In this belief that all are equal, and it is the obligation as a moral being to be considerate and compassionate, students develop their grace

and dignity based on their wish to accompany others and their needs. As stated by Levinas, and experienced in *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* awareness of others fosters conciliation. Using the novels in school, trying to understand the perspectives of characters allow students to develop an understanding of the characters as moral beings, in addition to training their ability to take accountability and be respectful of others. Working with these ethical dilemmas, conflicts and understanding ethics foster students' mediation and reflection based on compassion and empathy rather than anger. *LK2020* and Levinas perspectives on ethical beings and their obligation to each other value the development of ethical awareness. Writing an apology allows students to recognize hurt, anger, and self-centeredness. In taking accountability for the emotions they recognize in others; students will develop compassion and empathy for the pain of others. Developing compassion and awareness of others fosters an ability to show grace and dignity to others, which is an aim in conciliation. In training the ability to understand other perspectives, students develop a responsibility to treat all as equals to further an inclusive society where all beings are accepted and met with understanding to reduce conflict. Further didactic work with *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* can be established by working with characters such as Lucy Lurie and Kennedy, who both have more awareness of others and compassion in how their graciousness allows dignity towards others surpassing the cultural settings of the novels, which further the training of grace and dignity as an aim in all-round development.

This thesis has examined the presence of grace and dignity in Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and how these two novels can contribute to the ethical awareness of the other and to the development of dignified students who work for conciliation in school and society. *Small Great Things* and *Disgrace* contain the portrayal of characters who extend grace in interactions with others to encourage conciliation. Based on Levinas theory of the other, engaging with the literature to acquire a point of view from the novel will ensure that students become aware of others. This awareness fosters education and training on their ability to their moral imaginations, their responsibility, and their ethical obligation to other entrenched by empathy and compassion.

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