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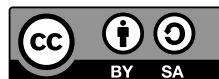
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## AN EXAMPLE OF SUBTLE INTERTEXTUALITY: ECHOES OF FLAUBERT'S *MADAME BOVARY* IN ANNE CLEEVES' *TELLING TALES*

### ABSTRACT

The topic of this article is intertextuality in the novel *Telling Tales* by the British writer Anne Cleeves. Cleeves is one of the most successful contemporary authors of crime novels. She owes part of her fame to high-profile television adaptations of the *Shetland* and *Vera* series. However, her novels are not only cleverly crafted stories to suit a wide audience; they also cater for more sophisticated readers. In this article, we aim to show the multilayered nature of her writing by using the example of *Telling Tales*, a novel that is interwoven with thematic and even formal allusions to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, although a reader who is not susceptible to intertextuality can enjoy the plot and denouement of a crime story even without it. Similarly, intertextual clues are easily missed in the television adaptation of the novel. But for the reader who catches the intertextual clues, they are certainly an enrichment. Anne Cleeves uses them as a means of psychological characterization, but they also serve as a starting point for reflection on reading. The author, who believes in the importance and even the therapeutic value of reading, allows for the possibility of a "bad", harmful reading and reflects on it through the story of a side character whose attitude to books and life is reminiscent of Flaubert's heroine.

**Keywords:** Anne Cleeves, Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, intertextuality, reading

### IZVLEČEK

#### PRIMER PREFINJENE MEDBESEDILNOSTI: ODMEVI FLAUBERTOVE *GOSPE BOVARY* V ROMANU *PRIPOVEDOVANJE ZGODB* ANNE CLEEVES

Tema pričujočega članka je medbesedilnost v romanu *Telling Tales* (*Pripovedovanje zgodb*) britanske pisateljice Anne Cleeves. Anne Cleeves je ena najuspešnejših sodobnih avtoric kriminalnih

romanov. Del svoje slave dolguje odmevnim televizijskim priredbam (seriji *Shetland* in *Vera*). Vendar pa njeni romani niso le spretno izpisane zgodbe po okusu širokega občinstva, temveč zadovoljijo tudi zahtevnejše bralce. V članku želimo na primeru romana *Telling Tales*, ki ga avtorica preplete z vsebinskimi in celo formalnimi aluzijami na Flaubertov roman *Gospa Bovary*, prikazati večplastnost njenega pisanja. Bralec, ki za medbesedilnost ni dovzeten, lahko tudi brez nje uživa v zapletu in razpletu kriminalne zgodbe. Prav tako medbesedilne namige zlahka pogrešimo v televizijski priredbi romana. Za bralca, ki medbesedilne namige prestreže, pa ti zagotovo pomenijo obogatitev. Anne Cleeves jih uporabi kot sredstvo psihološke karakterizacije, služijo pa ji tudi kot izhodišče za refleksijo o branju. Avtorica, ki verjame v pomen in celo terapevtsko vrednost branja, skozi zgodbo stranske junakinje, ki po svojem odnosu do knjig in življenja močno spominja na Flaubertovo junakinjo, v zgodbo pripusti tudi razmislek o "slabem branju".

**Ključne besede:** Anne Cleeves, Gustave Flaubert, *Gospa Bovary*, medbesedilnost, branje

## 1 WHAT DOES IT AMOUNT TO, THAT STORY?

What happens in *Madame Bovary*, what kind of woman is Emma? Does Flaubert's novel have a message? In his controversial work *The Craft of Fiction*, Percy Lubbock provides some astonishingly clear answers to these questions.

What does it amount to, that story? Charles Bovary, a simple and slow-witted young country doctor, makes a prudent marriage, and has the fortune to lose his tiresome and elderly wife after no long time. Then he falls in love with the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, a pretty and fanciful young woman, who marries him. She is deeply bored by existence in a small market town, finds a lover, wearies of him and finds another, gets wildly into debt, poisons herself and dies. (Lubbock, 1921, p. 64)

According to Lubbock, even an average reader, let alone a literary critic, should be able to determine without any hesitation what Flaubert wanted to say with his novel. Therefore, still according to Lubbock, Flaubert's masterpiece offers itself as the ideal starting point for examining the writer's "craft", the way in which the story is presented.

[...] for my particular purpose, just now, there is no such book as his *Bovary*; for it is a novel in which the subject stands firm and clear, without the least shade of ambiguity to break the line which bounds it. The story of its treatment may be traced without missing a single link. [...] He is not of those who present many aspects, offering the support of one or other to different critical doctrines; Flaubert has only one word to say, and it is impossible to find more than a single meaning in it. (Lubbock, 1921, p. 60)

On the other hand, Lubbock is convinced that Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, although a classical masterpiece, is much less suitable for this purpose.

Not indeed that anybody's hand is more delicate than Tolstoy's at certain moments and for certain effects, and a critic is bound to come back to him again in connection with these. But we have seen how, in dealing with his book, one is continually distracted by the question of its subject; the uncertainty of Tolstoy's intention is always getting between the reader and the detail of his method. (Lubbock, 1921, p. 59)

In his admiration of Flaubert's famous book, Lubbock distances himself from his idol Henry James, who considered *Madame Bovary* to be little more than the most characteristically French among French novels.

It is not in the temper of English vision to see things as M. Flaubert sees them, and it is not in the genius of the English Language to present them as he presents them. With all respect to *Madame Bovary*, *Madame Bovary* is fortunately an inimitable work. (James, 1893, pp. 253–254)

However, if Henry James did not share Lubbock's admiration, he at least allowed for the possibility of different readings of Flaubert's work, about which he also modified his opinion somewhat over the years (cf. Delbaere-Garant, 1970, pp. 149–159).

Lubbock's point of view is all the more surprising since Flaubert's contemporaries were already divided on the meaning and message of *Madame Bovary*. The question of whether the novel is moral or immoral was, as we know, debated in court, not just among readers and literary critics. Flaubert defended himself by claiming that his work was simply a faithful representation of reality. This opinion was echoed by Sainte-Beuve and George Sand, both staunch supporters of Flaubert. Sainte-Beuve stressed that a great work of art such as *Madame Bovary* simply cannot be immoral. The only fault he saw in the novel was its bleakness, its lack of anything to give hope, a total absence of any sort of kindness.

Tout en me rendant bien compte du parti pris qui est la méthode même et qui constitue l'*art poétique* de l'auteur, un reproche que je fais à son livre, c'est que le bien est trop absent ; pas un personnage ne le représente. Le seul dévoué, désintéressé, amoureux en silence, le petit Justin, apprenti de M. Homais, est imperceptible. (Sainte-Beuve, 1858, p. 362)

Although she also felt that Flaubert was not explicit enough in his advocacy of goodness, George Sand believed that many readers had nevertheless grasped the implicit moral lesson of the book.

Il faut écrire pour tous ceux qui ont soif de lire et qui peuvent profiter d'une bonne lecture. Donc, il faut aller tout droit à la moralité la plus élevée qu'on ait en soi-même et ne pas faire mystère du sens moral et profitable de son œuvre. On a trouvé celui de *Madame Bovary*. Une partie du public criait au scandale, la partie la plus saine et le plus étendue y voyait une rude et frappante leçon donnée à la femme sans conscience et sans foi, à la vanité, à l'ambition, à la déraison. (Sand & Flaubert, 1904, pp. 443–444)

## 2 A PRETTY AND FANCIFUL YOUNG WOMAN

Like the novel, its heroine has been subject to different interpretations from the very beginning. George Sand, for example, judges her much more harshly than Sainte-Beuve who thinks that she was, at least initially and externally, an honest woman:

Pendant quelque temps Madame Bovary est, de fait, une honnête femme, bien que son nom secret, tel qu'on le lirait déjà inscrit au dedans, soit *perfidie* et *infidélité*. (Sainte-Beuve, 1858, p. 292)

Lubbock considers Emma Bovary a completely insignificant person, for Mario Vargas Llosa she is a fascinating woman and, above all, an ideal literary heroine.

Cuando desperté para retomar la lectura es imposible que no haya tenido dos certidumbres como dos relámpagos. Que ya sabía qué escritor me hubiera gustado ser y que desde entonces hasta la muerte viviría enamorado de Emma Bovary. Ella sería para mí, en el futuro, como para el Léon Dupuis de la primera época, “l’amoureuse de tous les romans, l’héroïne de tous les drames, le vague *elle* de tous les volumes de vers”. (Vargas Llosa, 1975, p. 5)

Vladimir Nabokov sees the problem of Emma Bovary quite differently. Her story, which has no connection to reality anyway (according to Nabokov, no literature does) is not a story of rebellion, adultery, consumerism, etc., but simply a story of a misguided, harmful attitude towards literature.

Some of the authors she knows are first-rate, such as Walter Scott or Victor Hugo; others not quite first rate, such as Bernardin de Saint-Pierre or Lamartine. But good or bad this is not the point. The point is that she is a bad reader. She reads books emotionally, in a shallow juvenile manner, putting herself in this or that female character's place. (Nabokov, 1980, p. 136)

In Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), where allusions to *Madame Bovary* are only one, easily accessible layer of intertextuality, the protagonist-narrator, Geoffrey

Braithwaite, a retired doctor and amateur *connoisseur* of Flaubert's work, recalls his late wife Ellen during a trip to Normandy. There are quite a few, perhaps too many, clues that lead us to read Braithwaite's story of an unhappy marriage as a "transposition" of the story of the Bovary couple. Braithwaite is a retired doctor, like Charles. His late wife's name was Ellen; the initials EB are a clear allusion to Flaubert's heroine. He loved her much more than she loved him, but he did not understand and still does not understand her. Like Emma Bovary, Ellen Braithwaite is or rather was a serial adulteress. And like Emma, she died by suicide. All these parallels between the doctor's personal story and that of *Madame Bovary* point us towards a certain reading of Flaubert's masterpiece. *Madame Bovary* can be transposed to modern times, because it is not essentially a novel about late 19<sup>th</sup> century French social reality, but a novel on eternal, universal themes.

A similar reading of Mme Bovary seems to be the starting point for the graphic novel *Gemma Bovary* (1999) by the British writer and cartoonist Posy Simmonds, which was also made into a film in 2014. Gemma Bovary is an English expatriate in Normandy. Like Flaubert's Emma, she is dissatisfied with her overly passive husband and her life in general. Like Emma Bovary, she compensates for her dissatisfaction with consumerism and promiscuity. The parallels between Gemma's and Emma's story are noticed by the curious busybody baker Joubert, himself a parallel to Flaubert's apothecary Homais. The baker sends Gemma a photocopy of Flaubert's novel. By drawing her attention to the parallels, he sets the events in motion and causes Gemma's death. In the aftermath, Joubert is tormented by a bad conscience. Day by day, he superstitiously awaits the death of Gemma's husband Charles – until he realizes that the widower's name is Cyrill, not Charles. At the end of the novel, an elderly couple moves into the house previously occupied by the Bovarys. The wife's name in Jane Eyre.

Woody Allen's *The Kugelmass Episode*, another example of a variation on the theme of *Madame Bovary*, is also based on the idea that Emma could very well be a heroine of our time. Allen's approach to Flaubert's novel is significantly more playful than that of Posy Simmonds, but at the same time more complex, almost scholarly in its intertextuality. Allen extends the intertextual clues to various interpretations of Flaubert's novel, including Lubbock's. Like Lubbock, Professor Kugelmass does not find Tolstoy's greatest novel suitable for his purpose. Like Henry James, he considers *Madame Bovary* to be the essence of Frenchness. The narrative of the love affair between Professor Kugelmass and Emma Bovary can certainly be read as a literary essay – albeit a very entertaining one.

The protagonist, "a professor of humanities at City College", realizes one day during a visit to a psychotherapist that something essential is missing in his life.

"I need to meet a new woman," he went on. "I need to have an affair. I may not look the part, but I'm a man who needs romance. I need softness, I need flirtation. I'm not getting younger, so before it's too late I want to make love in Venice, trade quips at 21, and exchange coy glances over red wine and candlelight. You see what I'm saying?" (Allen, 1980, p. 25)

The therapist warns Kugelmass that the point of therapy is to express and analyse desires, not to fulfil them. In any case, he is not capable of fulfilling them: he is a psychiatrist, not a magician. Kugelmann takes the hint and enlists the help of a magician called The Great Persky, who promises to transport him to the novel of his choice with the help of a magic cabinet.

“[...] If I throw any novel into this cabinet with you, shut the doors and tap three times, you will find yourself projected into that book. [...] So who do you want to meet? Sister Carrie? Hester Prynne? Ophelia? Maybe someone by Saul Bellow? Hey, what about Temple Drake? Although for a man of your age she'd be a workout.”

“French. I want to have an affair with a French lover.”

“Nana?”

“I don't want to have to pay for it.”

“What about Natasha in *War and Peace*?”

“I said French. I know. What about Emma Bovary? That sounds to me perfect.” (Allen, 1980, p. 27)

With the help of the magician, Kugelmass is transported to Yonville and spends an afternoon with Emma. Later in the story, Emma returns the visit, transported in the same magic cabinet. The two lovers spend a few wonderful days in New York, staying at the Plaza Hotel. Emma especially enjoys the shopping.

These strange events then appear in *Madame Bovary*, confusing some readers, students and professors.

“I cannot get my mind around this,” a Stanford professor said “First a strange character named Kugelmass, and now she's gone from the book. Well, I guess the mark of a classic is that you can reread it a thousand times and always find something new.” (Allen, 1980, p. 31)

The story gets (predictably) complicated when the magician's cabinet starts malfunctioning. Emma is stranded in New York, with dire consequences for the professor's wallet. When the magician finally succeeds in sending Emma back to where she came from, Kugelmass wishes for a new and different adventure. He asks the magician to transfer him to Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. The magic fails this time, with a tragic outcome for both the magician and Kugelmass. The cabinet explodes, the magician dies of a heart attack, his house burns down. And as for Professor Kugelmass, he has “his own problems”.

He had not been thrust into *Portnoy's Complaint*, or into any other novel, for that matter. He had been projected into an old textbook, *Remedial Spanish*, and was running for his life over a barren, rocky terrain as the word *tener* (“to have”) – a large and hairy irregular verb – raced after him on its spindly legs. (Allen, 1980, p. 34)

### 3 I WRITE AS A READER, I THINK.

Anne Cleeves (1954) is one of Britain's most successful contemporary crime novelists. Her novels, particularly the Inspector Jimmy Perez and Inspector Vera Stanhope series, are also well known for their television adaptations (*Shetland* (2013–2016); *Vera* (2011–2025)).

Despite their undeniable literary quality, Cleeves' books can be described as reader friendly. It is therefore surprising, at least at first glance, that she refers to writing as "a selfish process". However, as she makes very clear in a 2020 interview given to a blogger, writerly egocentrism is not mutually exclusive with attention to the reader's needs. Cleeves "writes the kind of books she would like to read", she thus writes for herself, but for herself "as a reader":

When I'm writing I'm not really aware of the reader at all. It's a very selfish process. I write the book that I'd enjoy reading, I'm revelling in the process, in becoming my characters and seeing the world through their eyes. It's a sophisticated form of a child playing make-believe. There's nothing wrong with escapist fiction, either as a reader or a writer. [...] I write like a reader, I think. (<https://www.jayabhattacharjirose.com/i-write-like-a-reader-interview-with-ann-cleeves/>)

Despite her self-proclaimed artistic egocentrism, Cleeves is also deeply convinced of the importance, even the therapeutic effects of reading. The successful project "Reading for Wellbeing" that she initiated in 2020 is testimony to this.

To summarize. Anne Cleeves writes for her own pleasure, and thus indirectly for the pleasure of other readers. Identifying with the characters is an essential part of her writing process, as well as, according to her, a very common, normal, harmless, even beneficial reading response to fiction.

For the topic of this article, and in relation to the above interpretations of Flaubert's masterpiece, all of this is relevant for several reasons, and on more than one level.

Firstly, in her emphasis on the importance of identifying with literary heroes, Anne Cleeves is exactly what Vladimir Nabokov, using Emma Bovary as an example, calls "a bad reader". This is especially important because the story of Cleeves' novel *Telling Tales*, cleverly woven with intertextual allusions to *Madame Bovary*, is also, to some extent, that of a young woman unable to distinguish between real life and fiction. With her attitude to life, Emma Bennet is proof that not all reading is salutary.

Secondly, when we consider Anne Cleeves as a writer who is first and foremost a reader, we are explaining not only the reader-friendly character of her literature, but also her craftsmanship. To use Percy Lubbock's expression: Anne Cleeves' writing is "the craft of fiction" at its best.

One of the proofs of her erudition and technical brilliance is the skilful, subtle play she makes with intertextual allusions. For those who can read these literary clues, they

are sure to bring additional reading pleasure. They seem natural, unforced, and an organic part of the story, but understanding them is not necessary for the basic enjoyment of the text as a crime novel. The story and even the psychological development of the characters can be followed without them. As we shall see, Vera Stanhope gets to understand Emma's character without once thinking about *Madame Bovary*.

On the other hand: intertextual clues can be analysed without the need to provide the analysis with spoiler alerts. The television adaptation of the novel, the second in the Inspector Stanhope series, holds up without intertextual clues. On television, Emma Bennet's personal story is reduced to a minimum.

#### **4 IT WAS ABOUT TIME SHE GOT A LIFE.**

This is understandable. Emma Bennet is, in fact, a side character even in the book. She is a witness, a passive participant in the action, a person of secondary importance, even though the novel begins with her and from her point of view. Or perhaps: *precisely because* the novel begins with her and from her perspective.

Sitting at the bedroom window, Emma looks at the night-time square. The wind rattles a roof tile and hisses from the churchyard, spitting a Coke can into the street. There was a gale the afternoon Abigail Mantel died and it seems to Emma that it's been windy ever since [...]. It must be true at least since the baby was born. Since then, whenever she wakes at night to feed the baby or when James comes in late from work the noise of the wind is there [...]. James, her husband, isn't home yet, but she's not waiting up for him. Her gaze is fixed on the Old Forge where Dan Greenwood makes pots. There's a light at the window and occasionally she fancies she sees a shadow. She imagines that Dan is still working there, dressed in his blue canvas smock, his eyes narrowed as he shapes the clay with his strong, brown hands. Then she imagines leaving the baby, who is fast asleep, tucked up in his carry cot. She sees herself slipping out into the square and keeping go the shadows, walking across the forge. [...] Dan Greenwood looks up. His face is flushed and there is red dust in the furrows of his forehead. He isn't surprised to see her. He moves away from the bench where he's working and stands in front of her. She feels her breath quicken. He kisses her forehead and then begins to unbutton her shirt. He touches her breasts, stroking them, so he leaves lines of red clay like warpaint. She feels the clay drying on her skin and her breasts become tight, slightly itchy. [...] That was the story Emma told herself as she sat by her window the village of Elvet. A running commentary on her feelings, as if she was an outsider looking in.

It was how it had always been in her life as a series of fairy tales. Before Matthew had been born she'd wondered if his birth would make her more engaged. There was nothing more real, was there, than labour? But now [...] she thought that wasn't true. She was no more emotionally engaged with him than she was with James. (Cleeves, 2004, p. 4)

From the very first sentences of the novel, it is clear how much Emma Bennet resembles Flaubert's heroine. She is a young woman dissatisfied with her provincial life and her husband. She is a new mother who fails to attach to her child. She is a romantic in the Nabokovian sense of the word. And she is a bad reader in more than one way. It is obvious from her erotic fantasies that some of the authors she reads are "not quite first-rate". She sees her life as a story, herself as a literary heroine. The essence of her frustration is that her life, and perhaps life in general, bears so little resemblance to literature.

In some respects, however, her fate is very different from that of Flaubert's heroine. Emma Bennet is married to a man she no longer loves, while he adores her. But her husband James is no Charles Bovary. He is successful, respected, and women find him attractive. He even has a dark secret, which adds to his appeal. He is not a boisterous man, but he is much more confident than Emma.

As a passive, modest bystander through whose perspective we enter the story, Emma Bennet is not just an updated version of Emma Bovary. The opening scene of *Telling Tales*, in which Emma Bennet passively plays the lead role, is also a variation on the famous opening scene of *Madame Bovary*, centred on the awkward schoolboy Charles Bovary with his cap. So Emma Bennet is not only Emma, in some ways she is also "Charles", a timid, frustrated observer. This particular intertextual clue is probably the most sophisticated one in the whole book, as it relates both to the content and to the narrative technique. Emma's passive character and the randomness of her successes remind one of Charles Bovary. Entering the story from the point of view of a slightly pathetic side character is reminiscent of Flaubert's novel.

(In the TV series *Inspector Vera Stanhope*, most episodes start with an action-packed crime scene. After this scene and the opening music, Vera and her colleagues start investigating the crime. In the TV adaptation of the novel *Telling Tales*, the opening scene takes place not in Emma Bennet's bedroom, but in the street, where another side character is run over by a bus. The same side character, a young woman wrongly convicted of murder, does not even make an appearance in the novel. The reader, like the characters in the novel, only learns that she committed suicide in prison.)

Later in the novel, Anne Cleeves once again plays with a discreet yet recognizable intertextual allusion to the opening scene of *Madame Bovary*. In one of the few moments when Emma Bennet remembers that she once fantasized about her husband, he is carrying his cap under his arm.

The brass buttons on his jacket gleamed dully un the unnatural light. His head was bare. He carried his cap under his arm. Emma was reminded of when she had once had fantasies about him. (Cleeves, 2004, p. 6)

The most obvious allusion to Flaubert in *Telling Tales* is, of course, the fact that Emma Bennet is reading *Madame Bovary*. When James catches her with this book, she is uncomfortable.

Emma was in the living room. She'd lit a fire, he could smell the pine logs as soon as he came into the house. She was sitting in a big armchair, her legs tucked under her, and there was a book lying in her lap. Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* in French. Her eyes were shut and her breathing was regular. When he approached her she stirred. [...] He nodded at the book. "What's this?" The question seemed to make her uncomfortable. "You know what they say about languages lose them or use them. I might want to go back to teaching. I don't want to get rusty."

"Good idea. Coffee?" (Cleeves, 2004, p. 50)

Emma Bennet studied Russian and French. As a Russian teacher, she also met James, who had enrolled in a Russian course for his naval job. So she might well have chosen one of Tolstoy's novels to refresh her linguistic skills, or another French novel. But, like Percy Lubbock, like Allen's Professor Kugelmass, she chooses *Madame Bovary*. This is certainly a clear hint, which may sensitize a few additional readers to the intertextuality in *Telling Tales*. Still, it is not so clear and intrusive that it would spoil the pleasure of the more sophisticated, literary-minded reader who likes to pick up subtler clues.

Anne Cleeves' allusions to *Madame Bovary* go no further than this. Flaubert's book, as already stated, plays no role in the unfolding of the crime story. Inspector Stanhope, a lucid, psychologically knowledgeable and compassionate person, but certainly not a typical reader of French novels, forms an opinion about Emma Bennet during the investigation. If the Inspector had a thorough literary education, she would perhaps have labelled Emma Bennet's psychological state as a case of bovarysm. Since literature is not her field, she chooses a simpler, more general label, which in fact has a very similar, if not identical, meaning. Emma Bennet is like Emma Bovary, both Emmas live in fiction instead of reality. In both cases, the literature to which they have recourse is the subject of ironic ridicule. Emma Bovary, as Flaubert's absent narrator lets us know, is a victim of "not quite-first rate" romanticism. Emma Bennet, as Inspector Stanhope points out, is in danger of becoming a victim of "Victorian melodrama".

Unlike the original Emma, Emma in *Telling Tales* may still have a chance to save herself. At the end of the novel, Anne Cleeves puts a wise thought in Inspector Stanhope's mouth. This lesson, although clichéd, is psychologically plausible as something a person like Vera Stanhope might think. She is not without imagination, on the contrary,

but her imagination is highly empathetic and extremely practical. As a detective, she relies on imagination whenever mere observation fails. But her aim is always in reality. In the conclusion of the novel, the inspector notes, good-naturedly and slightly scornfully, that Emma Bennet would also benefit from a greater focus on real life.

Emma Bennet had returned home to James. She was sitting in the bedroom window, looking out over the square, apparently lost in thought. Like the heroine of some Victorian melodrama, Vera thought.

It was about time she got a life. (Cleeves, 2004, p. 224)

Stop reading, start living. This lesson may seem strange coming from the pen of a writer who, as we noted early on, believes in the usefulness and even in the therapeutic value of reading. But the contradiction is only superficial, as identifying bad, harmful reading is something we learn by reading. Anne Cleeves demonstrates this with the subtle intertextuality of her novel: an intertextuality that is an unobtrusive part of psychological characterization, and that recedes into the background when psychological plausibility demands it. Inspector Stanhope has probably not read Flaubert. Anne Cleeves read him very closely, so she knew when to abandon the intertextual play in favour of the inspector's common sense.

[...] toutes les classes, tous les groupes humains ont leurs récits, et bien souvent les récits sont goûtés en commun par des hommes de culture différente, voire opposée : le récit se moque de la bonne et de la mauvaise littérature. (Barthes, 1966, p. 1)

Cleeve's *Telling Tales* illustrates and confirms Roland Barthes' point of view: people with different cultural backgrounds can enjoy the same narrative. While Cleeves' writing does not in any way fit the definition of "bad literature", an educated reader is likely to be more sensitive to its literary qualities than an uneducated one. In other words: the pleasure of the reading is for everyone; the perception of quality depends on the reader. And finally, a superfluous remark: only a very good author can write such a multifaceted piece of literature.

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