The intelligence of fiction
Françoise LAVOCAT
SFLGC, Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris
E-mail: francoise.lavocat@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr
ORCID: 0000-0003-3423-3331

Abstract
Fiction has since long ago (at least since the year 1000, with the Tale of Genji), been accused of making people, and more particularly women, stupid. The most famous heroes characterised by their addiction to fiction (Don Quixote and Madame Bovary, or even the Cecilia of The Purple Rose of Cairo) are neither distinguished by their intelligence nor their ability to adapt to the world or their participation through work in society. In the past, fiction was also suspected of undermining women’s chastity and morality; now, it is accused of facilitating the passage of violent beings into action. Without dwelling too much on this endless and repetitive indictment, I would also like to point out the current contempt for fiction that accompanies what is called "the documentary turn". Several critics ridicule the clichés and the supposed exhaustion of fiction, and a prominent young French author, Edouard Louis, claims that he rejects it for political reasons. On the other hand, since the 1980s and the rise of fiction theories, the advantages of fiction have been constantly highlighted, mainly from an educational and therapeutic point of view. From Aristotle to evolutionary and cognitive theories, fiction is supposed to train children’s abilities to read minds, educate them to sociability and solicit capacities to empathy (Schaeffer, 1999, Zunshine 2006). Alexandre Gefen highlighted the extraordinary vogue of theories that attributed healing powers to fiction (2017).
My purpose in this paper is to question the intelligence of fiction, rather than whether it makes the reader more or less intelligent. I would also like to take the gap I just have developed into account, i.e. between the lasting accusations against fiction and its praise.

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