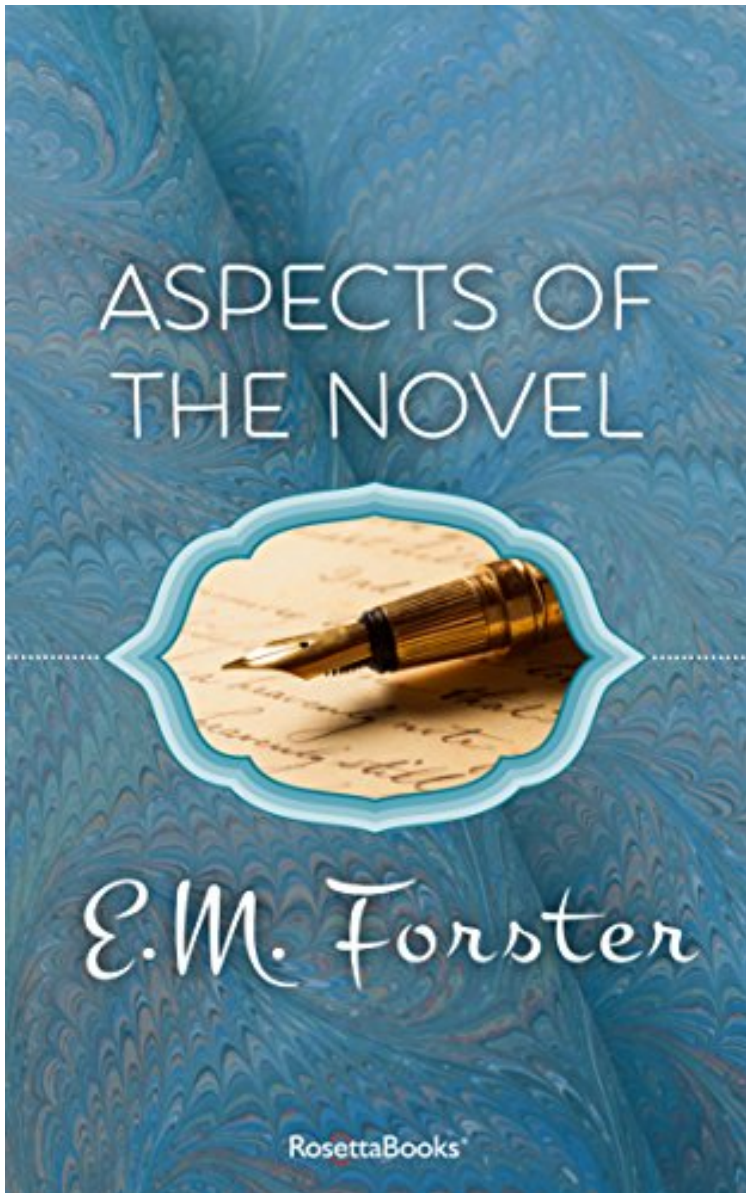


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# Aspects of the Novel (English Edition)



*Par E. M. Forster*  
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**Description :** Description du produitForester's wit and lively, informed originality have made this study of the novel a classic. Avoiding the chronological approach of what he calls "pseudoscholarship," Forster freely examines elements that all English-language novels have in common: story, people, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern and rhythm. The reader comes away with a deeper appreciation for the novel in general, also for Forster, himself a distinguished author (HOWARDS END and A PASSAGE TO INDIA). "We discover, under [Forster's] casual but acute guidance, many things about the literary magic which transmute the dull stuff of He-said and She-said into characters, stories, and intimations of truth." (Harper's Magazine)

Prsentation de l'diteurSponsored by Trinity College of the University of Cambridge, The Clark Lectures

have a long and distinguished history and have featured remarks by some of England's most important literary minds: Leslie Stephen, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, William Emsley, and I. A. Richards. All have given celebrated and widely influential talks as featured keynote speakers. An important milestone came in 1927 when, for the first time, a novelist was invited to speak: E.M. Forster had recently published his masterpiece,

*A Passage to India*, and rose to the occasion, delivering eight spirited and penetrating lectures on the novel. The decision to accept the lectureship was a difficult one for Forster. He had deeply ambivalent feelings about the use of criticism. Although suspecting that criticism was somewhat antithetical to creation, and upset by the thought that time spent on the lectures took away from his own work, Forster accepted. His talks were witty and informal, and consisted of sharp penetrating bursts of insight rather than overly-methodical analysis. In short, they were a great success. Gathered and published later as *Aspects of the Novel*, the ideas articulated in his lectures would gain widespread recognition and currency in twentieth century criticism. Of all of the insights contained within *Aspects of the Novel*, none has been more influential or widely discussed than Forster's discussion of "flat" and "round" characters. So familiar by now as to seem commonplace, Forster's distinction is meant to categorize the different qualities of characters in literature and examine the purposes to which they are put. Still, it would be wrong to reduce this book to its most famous line of argument and enquiry. *Aspects of the Novel* also discusses the difference between story and plot, the characteristics of prophetic fiction, and narrative chronology. Throughout, Forster draws on his extensive readings in English, French, and Russian literature, and discusses his ideas in reference to such figures as Joyce, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, James, Sterne, Defoe, and Proust.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR.** M. Forster published his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, in 1905, which was quickly followed in 1907 by *The Longest Journey*, and then in 1908 with *A Room with a View*. However, Forster's major breakthrough came in 1910 with the book *Howard's End*, which is often still regarded as his greatest work. Forster was associated with the Bloomsbury Group, a collective of intellectuals and peers, among them Virginia Woolf, Benjamin Britten, Roger Fry, and John Maynard Keynes. The 1924 publication of *A Passage to India* firmly cemented Forster in the literary firmament as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century with this being one of the most important novels of the twentieth century. It was, however, the last novel Forster ever completed.

There are all kinds of books out there purporting to explain that odd phenomenon the novel. Sometimes it's hard to know whom they're for, exactly. Enthusiastic readers? Fellow academics? Would-be writers? *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster's 1927 treatise on the "fictitious prose work over 50,000 words" is, it turns out, for anyone with the faintest interest in how fiction is made. Open at random, and find your attention utterly sandbagged. Forster's book is not really a book at all; rather, it's a collection of lectures delivered at Cambridge University on subjects as parboiled as "People," "The Plot," and "The Story." It has an unpretentious verbal immediacy thanks to its spoken origin and is written in the key of Apologetic Mumble: "Those who dislike Dickens have an excellent case. He ought to be bad." Such gentle provocations litter these pages. How can you not read on? Forster's critical writing is so ridiculously plainspoken, so happily commonsensical, that we often forget to be intimidated by the rhetorical landscapes he so ably leads us through. As he himself points out in the introductory note, "Since the novel is itself often colloquial it may possibly withhold some of its secrets from the graver and grander streams of criticism, and may reveal them to backwaters and shallows." And Forster does paddle into some unlikely eddies here. For instance, he seems none too gung ho about love in the novel: "And lastly, love. I am using this celebrated word in its widest and dullest sense. Let me be very dry and brief about sex in the first place." He really means in the first place. Like the narrator of a '50s hygiene film, Forster continues, dry and brief as anything, "Some years after a human being is born, certain changes occur in it..." One feels here the same-sexer having the last laugh, heartily. Forster's brand of humanism has fallen from fashion in literary studies, yet it endures in fiction itself. Readers still love this author, even if they come to him by way of the multiplex. The durability of his work is, of course, the greatest *raison d'être* this book could have. It should have been titled *How to Write Novels People Will Still Read in a Hundred Years*. --Claire Dederer

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