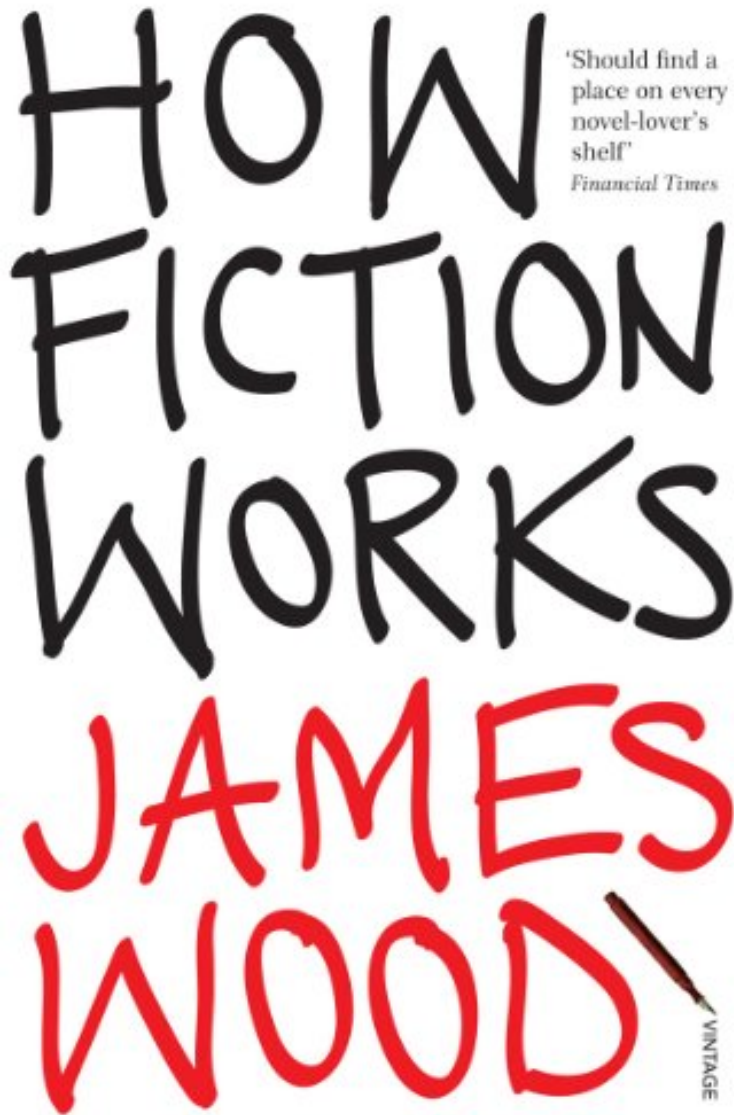


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How Fiction Works



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn the tradition of E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and Milan Kundera's *The Art of the Novel*, *How Fiction Works* is a scintillating and searching study of the main elements of fiction, such as narrative, detail, characterization, dialogue, realism, and style. In his first full-length book of criticism, one of the most prominent critics of our time takes the machinery of story-telling apart to ask a series of fundamental questions: What do we mean when we say we 'know' a fictional character? What constitutes a 'telling' detail? When is a metaphor successful? Is realism realistic? Why do most endings of novels disappoint?Wood ranges widely, from Homer to Beatrix Potter, from the Bible to John Le Carr, and his book is both a study of the techniques of fiction-making and an alternative history of the novel. Playful and

profound, it incisively sums up two decades of bold, often controversial, and now classic critical work, and will be enlightening to writers, readers, and anyone interested in what happens on the page..com Best of the Month, July 2008: The first thing you'll notice about *How Fiction Works* is its size. At 252 pages, it's a marvel of economy for a book that asks such a huge question and right away you'll want to know (as you might at the start of a new novel) what the author has in store. James Wood takes only his own bookshelves as his literary terrain for this study, and that in itself is the most delightful gift: he joins his audience as a reader, citing his chosen texts judiciously--ranging from Henry James (from whom he takes the best epigraph to a book I've ever read) to Nabokov, Joyce, Updike, and more--to explore not just how fiction works, mechanically speaking, but to reflect on how a novelist's choices make us feel that a novel ultimately works ... or doesn't. Wood remarks that you have to "read enough literature to be taught by it how to read it." His terrific bibliography will surely be a boon to anyone's education, but it's his masterful writing that you'll want to keep reading over the course of your life. --Anne Bartholomew
From Publishers Weekly
Starred . Wood takes aim at E.M. Forster's longtime standard-bearer *Aspects of the Novel* in this eminently readable and thought-provoking treatise on the ways, whys and hows of writing and reading fiction. Wood addresses many of the usual suspects: plot, character, voice, metaphor with a palpable passion (he denounces a verb as pompous and praises a passage from *Sabbath's Theater* as an amazingly blasphemous little mlange), and his inviting voice guides readers gently into a brief discourse on thisness and chosenness, leading up to passages on how to push out, the contagion of moralizing niceness and, most importantly, a new way to discuss characters. Wood dismisses Forster's notions of flat or round characters and suggests that characters be evaluated in terms of transparencies and opacities determined not by the reader's expectations of how a character may act (as in Forster's formula), but by a character's motivations. Wood, now at the *New Yorker* and arguably the pre-eminent critic of contemporary English letters, accomplishes his mission of asking a critic's questions and offer[ing] a writer's answers with panache. This book is destined to be marked up, dog-eared and cherished. (Aug.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.