Active Learning in EFL: Introspect and Prospect
Faculty of Education
E. M. Forster’s Theory of Fiction  
(A Post-modernist Critical Reading)

E. M. Forster is a great British novelist of the twentieth century who wrote only six novels that have placed him as one of the greatest novelists in the modern age. He was a friend of Virginia Woolf and one of the Bloomsbury group. At the age of 46, he stopped writing novels and started to write non-fiction and short stories. In 1907 he wrote his novel *The Longest Journey*, then *A Room with a View* (1908). The novel which gained him fame is *Howards End* in 1910. Later in 1924 Forster wrote his last novel and masterpiece, *A Passage to India*, which was based on his experience in India and Egypt. It presents his points of view as a post-colonial novelist. The most important literary critical works which he wrote are *Abinger Harvest* in 1936, *Two Cheers for Democracy* in 1951 and *Aspects of the Novel* in 1927. This latter critical book represents Forster’ search about the aspects of the novel and it is taken as an important critical survey in the modern age. The present critical reading will determine the place of E. M.
Forster as a modernist and a fiction theorist. The study intends to find out the importance of *Aspects of the Novel* as a theory of post-modern fiction. It introduces a post-modern critical reading of the book as a literary theory which is considered a revolution in fiction criticism during the 20th century.

Anthony Burgess, a modern American novelist (1996) explains, “It is hard to say how E. M. Forster fits into any pattern” (221). This statement about Forster indicates the significant status of this novelist-critic in the early 20th century. The fact that Forster belongs to two eras (the late Victorian and the early Modern) is the cause behind the difficulty of fitting him into a certain pattern. The element of humanism in Forster’s writings does not mean that he is not a modernist or that he represents the Victorian points of view. Alan Wilde (1981) confirms that “Forster is a modernist” (51). But what is the humanistic element in his novels called? The readers of Forster’s novels cannot miss the themes of intimate human relationships that are very close to Thomas Hardy’s traditional themes of the English countryside, in particular his novel *Howards End*. The humanism of Forster is his way to find a balance in life
struggle. Forster believes that human relationships can defeat the impotency of life. Brain May (1996) says, "According to this Forsterian voice, an idealist may, after all, find what Forster's admirable characters seek, 'The Spirit of Life'" (234). The humanistic element in Forster’s works does not mean that he is a traditionalist and should be judged against the same criteria of the traditional writers of the Victorian period. The inclination of the modernists to rely on thoughts or rationality rather than on emotions is clear in Forster’s writings. He believes that both elements should be present in a literary work to achieve the balance and to defeat life problems.

However, the modernists did not see this point of view and some of them believe that humanism in literature is a defect that should be reconciled. May (1996) explains that all modern critics agree that “Modernist ironies were so apocalyptic that they had to be fought or fled, but whether fought or fled they were bound to eradicate even the staunchest humanist pieties” (234). Some critics believe that Forster succeeded in finding some sort of unity between his humanism and the ideas which he himself called his mind and his heart. In the introduction of his
novel *The Longest Journey* he wrote: “For in it I have managed to get nearer than elsewhere towards what was on my mind- or rather towards that junction of mind with heart where the creative impulse sparks. Thoughts and emotions collided if they did not always co-operate” (qtd in John Colmer 1975 66). This means that Forster manages to blend his realism with his modernism in his novels and books. He manages to find a place for his thoughts as well as for his emotions. Claude Summers (1983) stresses “an early expression of the peculiarly Fosterian blend of skepticism and mysticism," but he somehow concludes that *Journey* "espouses Forster's mature humanism" with "celebrations of the personal" (76). However, to acknowledge Forster as a modernist through his novels and his essays is to neglect other important aspects of his writings. May (1996) says about Forster's *The Longest Journey*:

The comedy of Rickie's growth as a lover should satirize a particular lover's sentimentalism as a means of promoting romance. But the satire turns into a modernist critique of love--one that judges love to be not occasionally but essentially
sentimental. The punitive attack on a single character turns into a virtually nihilistic attack on character itself, an exercise in "disjunctive irony" (236).

In fact, the plots of Forster are full of evidence of ‘anti-romanticism and anti humanism’ which means that he is more a modernist than a Victorian traditionalist. May (1996) assures, "Forster, in his role as Edwardian satirist, suggests that symbolism, even when it takes the form of a relative painless habit, ends in revulsion: revulsion from the disenchanted object, from the urge to symbolize, from the symbolizing self" (236). What kind of modernist theorist is he? Forster is a modernist with a very strong inclination to have the spirits of a Victorian traditionalist in his works. Robert Langbaum (qtd in May 1996) would agree,

These two Forsterian ideas are distinctly modernist ones. Obviously post-Victorian and post-Edwardian, they are to be contrasted with the post-modern, as well. The "vision of multiplicity, randomness, contingency, and even absurdity" is pretty radical in both modernism and post-modernism, but the former
is effectively more "negational" than the latter, being more apt to elicit serious attempts to regain "control" ("control being one of the chief imperatives of the modernist imagination" [Wilde, 1981, 10]) than to encourage playfulness? (237)

Now, Forester, the modernist, has his own theory related to the detailed description of fiction. He explained these ideas in his great critical work *Aspects of the Novel*. This text has been chosen for some reasons. First of all, this book can be read as a kind of meta-novel. The book is written by an important prolific novelist who gives his discussion and argument sound judgments and importance concerning his theory of fiction. “Forster is always thematically concerned with the problem of connectedness in human relations; his characters desire to understand each other and to connect in true and honest friendship, yet they never feel totally fulfilled or totally successful in their relationships” (R.A. Buck 1996 64). My aim is to explain how Forster describes his characters at a thematic level to show their personal interaction which is clear linguistically at the level of his novels. Buck (1996) adds,
In Forster's novels, the powerful social dynamic at work between characters makes the novels appealing to examine from a sociolinguistic viewpoint: Forster consistently portrays characters interacting with those culturally or socially unequal to them and thus encountering unavoidable conflict in their personal relations. Forster's characters continually find themselves confronting another who comes to the dialogic scene already socially marked as being "on the other side." ... The opposition is a force that must be reckoned with as the characters construct their linguistic messages. (64)

A final point to make concerning the interest in Forster’s book is that, at the level of his themes, he presents a discussion about fictional characters who are concerned with their social relations and conventions. In addition the aim is to explain how Forster describes the fictional characters that argue, discuss and work around their social conventions. While many of the characters’ actions take place at the thematic level (the subject matter) of the novel, it gets repeated at an implicit level (the style) through the dialogue.
What is the importance of this book as a work of post-modern criticism? *Aspects of the Novel* describes the theory of fiction from the point of view of an important novelist-critic. But I would like to start by clarifying the difference between a romance and a novel, "where novels were characterized by a greater degree of realism than romances" (Welsh 1968 12). In the preface to *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), for example, Horace Walpole (1963) refers to this generic distinction and states that his work was an attempt to blend "two kinds of fiction: the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability; in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success" (19). In an early and influential discussion on the difference between the novel and romance, Clara Reeve (1930 1785), in *The Progress of Romance*, stated that a romance is a heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. A novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written while a romance, in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened or is likely to happen.
The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things as pass every day before our eyes; . . . and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them seem so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real. (Reeve 1930 111)

According to Walter Scot, a romance is "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse, the interest of which turns upon marvelous and uncommon incidents." The novel, on the other hand, is a "fictitious narrative, differing from the romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society" (qtd in Welsh 1968 13). In his preference of the novel for its superior adherence to the laws of probability and necessity, Scott granted that genre a greater importance based upon normative and socially determined, rather than strictly aesthetic or formal, criteria. This notion of the novel as both an expressive and a truth-telling activity is closely associated with the British society's attempt to locate its identity. Alexander Welsh (1968) notes that fiction in the first half of the nineteenth century was supposed to be a
truth-seeking "practice as natural and universal as language itself" (5). Victorian critics like Thomas Carlyle reacted to what they considered a dangerous mixing of subjects and styles. This dangerous mixing was seen in the difference between the meaning and the structure. George Levine (1981) sees the difference in the conflict between the "organic" and the "mechanical" during the Victorian era: "The faith was that science would reveal the organic, the secularists last hope for meaning and the validation of morality; the fear was that it would yield only the mechanical" (19). The modern and post-modern critics try to make a clear distinction between a novel and a romance, as to differentiate between the form and the content. The question of the meaning or the structure is raised by Forster through his discussion of the characteristics of the novel. This difference is clear in the book, *Aspects of the Novel*, because the author discusses the elements related to a novel and introduces the tradition of the previous novelists.

*Aspects of the Novel* is a book of criticism based on some lectures delivered by Forster about the English novel in 1927. Forster presents some kind of survey about the art of fiction and he starts from Daniel Defoe to James Joyce. In
the book he explains his own points of view concerning the theory of fiction, the style and the form of novels. One of the critics of his time, F. R. Leavis, said that the lectures of Forster are “intellectually null”, but a great success (Peter Childs Web). This success is created by his witty and informal remarks. George Watson (2003) states, “Those who heard his Clark lectures in Cambridge in 1927 on Aspects of the Novel recall the quiet amiability of his performance. The lectures became the widely read book about fiction between the wars” (630). His ideas gained widespread success in twentieth century criticism. He introduces some aspects which he thinks are the most important aspects concerning the art of fiction. His decision of using the term ‘aspects’ is a liberal and post-modern way of thinking. “I have chosen the title Aspects because it is unscientific and vague, because it leaves us the maximum of freedom, because it means both the different ways we can look at a novel and the different ways a novelist can look at his work” (Forster 2005 22). “In these lectures (under the "unscientific and vague" title of Aspects) he held forth on seven subjects: The Story; People; The Plot; Fantasy and Prophecy; Pattern and Rhythm.
Forster does not acknowledge the historical approach to examine the history of fiction but he imagines that all the novelists from different ages are sitting together in one room and writing at the same time. So, he wants to dismiss the cultural background and focus on the subjects, the ideas and the style of writing a novel.

Near the beginning Forster declares his dislike of time’s tyranny, and informs us that he will consider authors not along chronological lines but along existential ones. Like some great literary roundtable, he asks us to imagine “that all the novelists are at work together in a circular room.” Presented thus, we can group writers not by era but by subject-matter, which Forster proceeds to do. (The Quarterly Conversation Web)

Moreover, Forster succeeds to compare the style of some novelists to find out the similarities and differences among them. In his book, he wrote:

It is obvious that here sit two novelists who are looking at life from much the same angle, yet the first of them is Samuel Richardson, and the second you
will have already identified as Henry James. Each is an anxious rather than an ardent psychologist. Each is sensitive to suffering and appreciates self-sacrifice; each falls short of the tragic, though a close approach is made. (Forster 2005 13)

When Forster comes to this level of analysis, he mentioned the Theory of Tradition by T. S. Eliot which focuses on the historical study of literature. Forster mentions the works of Tristam Shandy, Jane Austen, Moby Dick, and The Arabian Nights as standers that should be studied to find out their advantages. He examines Eliot’s theory and decides that he will find out how the theory of tradition can be applied to help him explore and accomplish his critical survey of novels from different ages.

The first duty we cannot perform, the second we must try to perform. We can neither examine nor preserve tradition. But we can visualize the novelists as sifting in one room, and force them, by our very ignorance, from the limitations of date and place. I think that is worth doing, or I should not have ventured to undertake this course. (Forster 2005 21)
However, Forster does not see the importance of the historical background of the novelists and at the same time he does not see the importance of the historical interpretations of literature. He imagines that all the English novelists are seated together in a circular room, writing their novels simultaneously, away from the influences of history which are not stable.

We are to visualize the English novelists not as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful, but as seated together in a room, a circular room … They do not, as they sit there, think: "I live under Queen Victoria, I under Anne, I carry on the tradition of Trollope, I am reacting against Aldous Huxley. (Forester 2005 7)

So, Forster decides that the idea of tradition could also mean the study of the style of some novelists from different ages to see the progress of the novel and the novelists and to argue for his ideas about the importance of the aspects of the novel. Eventually, Forster declares that his critical plan in this study is comparative and traditional in a post-modern
sense of the theory that was used by the earlier critics. He wrote:

Mr. Eliot enumerates, in the introduction to *The Sacred Wood*, the duties of the critic: ‘It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition – where a good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it not as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time...’ (Forster 2005 21)

In addition, Forster speaks about the theory of composition, which by 1907 became a part of the literary creation. He told Dickinson (Forster 1907) in a letter that "all I write is, to me, sentimental," and that "a book which doesn't leave people either happier or better than it found them, which doesn't add some permanent treasure to its world, isn't worth doing. A book about good and happy people may be still better but hasn't attracted me yet so much." So, he believes in the moral aspects of the novel. He believes that novels should have some sort of educational role and entertainment one. That is why in some cases it is hard to identify him as a modernist but some critics think of
him as a traditionalist. His theory of composition is based on the idea of enjoyment of literature that should have an effect on the reader. Forster started his discussion by explaining the importance of the story in a novel. His second chapter in the book is entitled “The Story”. He states that the story is the backbone of a novel, which means that there would be no novel without a story. Forster clearly believed that the ‘story’ was the bedrock of the novel, for without one the reader is left with merely a ‘bunch of words’ (Robert S. Fogarty 2003). However, he clarifies that there is a big difference between a story which just narrates events and keeps the audience alert of what happens next and a novel which must have some kind of artistic value. Forster expresses his admiration for The Arabian Nights: *A Thousand and One Tales* was central to his discussion of "The Story":

We are all like Scheherazade's husband, in that we want to know what happens next. That is universal and that is why the backbone of the novel has to be a story. Some of us want to know nothing else- there is nothing in us but primitive curiosity, and consequently our
other literary judgments are ludicrous. (Forster 2005 24)

Forster criticizes some great English novelists because their novels are no more than stories and because they are just storytellers. He thinks that Sir Walter Scott is a good storyteller because the phrase ‘and then’ is the key to his novels. He believes that there should be more liberal views of the storytelling and truth of perception. He describes Scott as a novelist who only has a historical value, but his novels lack artistic depth. He explains “If he had passion he would be a great writer —no amount of clumsiness or artificiality would matter then. But he only has a temperate heart and gentlemanly feelings, and an intelligent affection for the countryside; and this is not basis enough for great novels” (Forster 2005 27). Forster admits that those great British novelists are famous and loved because the older generation is attached to these novels which they read or were read aloud to them when they were young. He adds that Scott’s fame is due to his ability as a story teller. The Quarterly Conversation Review (Web) adds, “Forster has little love for story (“the lowest and simplest of literary organisms”), finding it most interesting in how it relates to
the passage of time in a book. Does it, as with the work of the workman Sir Walter Scott, proceed simply and usually end in marriage? A shame then, in Forster’s opinion, much better to try and fail like Gertrude Stein.” Forster clarifies his point of view by giving an example of another novelist:

> Gertrude Stein has smashed up and pulverized her clock and scattered its fragments over the world like the limbs of Osiris, and she has done this not from naughtiness but from a noble motive: she has hoped to emancipate fiction from the tyranny of time and to express in it the life by values only. She fails, because as soon as fiction is completely delivered from time it cannot express anything at all. (Forster 2005 37-38)

Then, Forster shifts his focus to the chronological order of the events in a story. So, he places the story in its right place in the novel. He explains that it is important but should have a value that would make it not only passionate but also intellectual. The story then should not only narrate the events in a sequence of what happens next but it should add logic of why things happen. The complexities in the
story are the real value of its importance. He gives an example of the great novel *War and Peace* by Tolstoy which has a story that does not only narrate the events in the sense of what comes next but it also presents space as well as time. In the book, he explains:

Then why is *War and Peace* not depressing? Probably because it has extended over space as well as over time, and the sense of space until it terrifies us is exhilarating, and leaves behind it an effect like music. After one has read *War and Peace* for a bit, great chords begin to sound, and we cannot say exactly what struck them. They do not arise from the story, though Tolstoy is quite as interested in what comes next as Scott, and quite as sincere as Bennett. (Forster 2005 35)

In chapter three, Forster begins to discuss the ‘actors’ to whom the simple story happens. The chapter is entitled ‘People’ and is described by Forster to be an interesting topic of discussion. The importance and the interest of the characters gave Forster the freedom to discuss this aspect in two chapters. In a comparing method like the one used by
Forster, readers can feel the difference and the reason. All aspects are discussed in one chapter but ‘People’ is discussed in two. He states that characters in the novels are human beings. He neglects animal characters diminishing their role in the history of the English Novels.

…we shall have animals who are neither symbolic, nor little men disguised, nor as four-legged tables moving, nor as painted scraps of paper that fly. It is one of the ways where science may enlarge the novel, by giving it fresh subject-matter. But the help has not been given yet, and until it comes we may say that the actors in a story are, or pretend to be, human beings. (Forster 2005 39).

Forester tells us that novelists are not like historians when they deal with the characters. Historians are interested in the known or obvious facts about these characters while novelists are interested in the unknown or the hidden lives of these characters. “The hidden life that appears in external signs is hidden no longer, has entered the realm of action. And it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source: to tell us more about
Queen Victoria than could be known, and thus to produce a character who is not the Queen Victoria of history” (Forster 2005 41). Forster points out that, fictional characters are not real human beings but they look like real people. He explains that, there is a difference between the lives of the characters in novels and the lives of real people. Novelists do not care much to the common life activities, (sleeping, eating) but they care for other aspects that make their characters seem real to the readers. He adds that, novelists allow us to know characters perfectly from outside and from inside, which is not the case in real life. In his comparison between the real people and the characters in novels, readers can understand the world of fiction:

Still, it is a profitable round-about, for it brings out the fundamental difference between people in daily life and people in books. In daily life we never understand each other, neither complete clairvoyance nor complete confessional exists. We know each other approximately, by external signs, and these serve well enough as a basis for society and even for intimacy. But people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as
well as their outer life can be exposed. (Forster 2005 42)

Forster, then widely and influentially discusses a new vision in looking at the characters in a novel. His post-modern prophetic distinction of characters to be ‘flat’ or ‘round’ is a new technique to understand characters. Andrew Blackman (2010) a modern novelist wrote:

Flat characters are ‘types’ or caricatures, people who can be summed up in a phrase. They have one function in the book and consistently perform that function exactly as expected. This can sometimes be effective – they are recognisable and consistent; most of Dickens’s characters are flat and yet he is one of the best novelists. In general, though, flat characters are best for a limited or comic role – tragic figures must be round. (Web)

Forster’s fictional theory which is discussed in his book, stresses the importance of the type of a character in a novel. He explains that both “flat” and “round” characters may be included in a successful novel. Forster's distinction is
meant to classify the different qualities of characters in literature and examine the functions to which they are put. A "flat" character, according to Forster, can be expressed in a single sentence and acts as a function of only a few fixed character traits. Forster explains what he means by ‘flat’ characters, “they are constructed round a single idea or quality; when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. The really flat character can be expressed in one sentence such as "I never will desert Mr. Micawber".”(Forster 2005 61) Forster, the critic, states the advantages of ‘flat’ characters. They can be easily recognized, and they can be easily remembered. They do not have much of the profoundness or the complexities of the real life characters. The other type of characters which he discusses is the ‘round’ characters. Forster explains that they are able to change and develop from one situation to another. They are able to surprise the readers or to contradict their opinions. He means that they are similar to real human beings in their complexities and contradiction. Forster makes his comparative study of the ‘flat’ and ‘round’: 
The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it—life within the pages of a book. And by using it sometimes alone, more often in combination with the other kind, the novelist achieves his task of acclimatization, and harmonizes the human race with the other aspects of his work. (Forster 2005 71)

Forster adds that the round characters are the good example to use because they are able to grow and to be positive in the fictional situations. However, flat characters do not grow or even develop or change with time. Flat characters do not have to be bad or to be the worst type of characters. Forster gives an example of Charles Dickens’s flat characters. His characters like David Copperfield do not change with time. Readers of Forster’s description of characters’ types would feel his preference to the ‘round’ characters not the ‘flat’ ones even when he admits that there are compelling artistic reasons for novelists to use ‘flat’ characters. Some novelist like Dickens use only flat characters while other novelists like to use round and
characters. Forster prefers novelist like Jane Austen who uses both round and flat characters. As Forster points out, she is even capable of taking a flat character like Mrs. Bennet, expand her suddenly into a round character, and then collapse her back into a round one. And her round characters are very round. Compare Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse with any character in Dickens, and the difference is obvious. On the other hand, Hemingway tends to create round male characters and flat female characters. This critical comparative study of characters in novels makes a distinctive vision of a post-modern fictional theory. Blackman (2010) comments, “Forster doesn’t like writers who betray too much interest in their own method, or “draws readers into his confidence” by showing them how the novel works. This was in 1927, long before the flourishing of post-modern meta-fictional writing – Forster would probably hate a lot of today’s most admired literary novelists” (Web).

In chapter four “The Plot”, Forster starts his discussion attacking Aristotle’s definition of plot that the happiness and misery of human beings take the form of action. “Aristotle is wrong, and now we must face the
consequences of disagreeing with him” (Forster 2005 76). Forster adds that Aristotle read no modern novels and he meant to speak mainly about drama which is different from the novel. Forster clarifies that the novel is unique. Novelists can express happiness or misery without an action and they are capable of talking about the characters’ subconsciousness. “The specialty of the novel is that the writer can talk about his characters as well as through them, or can arrange for us to listen when they talk to themselves. He has access to self-comumnings, and from that level he can descend even deeper and peer into the subconscious” (Forster 2005 76). Forster means to find the connection between the human beings in a novel and the plot. A novelist has to be intelligent to connect the events of the story to the life of the human beings in the novel. So, he defines ‘plot’ in completely different way from the way Aristotle understands. “A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. ‘The king died and then the queen died’ is a story. ‘The king died, and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it” (Forster 2005 78). Forster presents a definition of ‘plot’
which is mainly connected to novels. Plot is more relevant to ask about the reason. To say that the queen died is a story which needs ‘and then’ but to say why the queen died that is a plot. Readers have to be intelligent as well and have to have a good memory to remember incidents and find connection among them which allow the novelists to create mystery in their plots. "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king. This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time-sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow” (Forster 2005 78). He adds that the mystery in a plot is the real source of suspense which is the key of successful novels.

Then, Forster shifts his focus to Fantasy and Prophecy in two chapters. Forster regards them as central aspects of the great novel. He 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. Forster believes that these two aspects require certain qualities in readers. “Well, the prophetic aspect demands two qualifies:
humility and the suspension of the sense of humour” (Forster 2005 113). Fantasy is some sort of literary tone which is fantastic in a novel because sometimes it is related to spirituality, universality or supernatural elements in a book. He expresses what he means by fantasy:

Well, that must serve as our definition of fantasy. It implies the supernatural, but need not express it. Often it does express it, and were that type of classification helpful, we could make a list of the devices which writers of a fantastic turn have used —such as the introduction of a god, ghost, angel, monkey, monster, midget, witch into ordinary life; or the introduction of ordinary men into no man's land, the future, the past, the interior of the earth, the fourth dimension; or divings into and dividings of personality; or finally the device of parody or adaptation. (Forster 2005 101)

In addition, Forster explains that prophecy is some sort of vision which is found in some novelists like Dostoevsky and George Eliot. Forster's major concern is that individuals should 'connect the prose with the passion'
within themselves, and that one of the most challenging aspect of the novel is prophecy. In the book he writes:

If human nature does alter, it will be because individuals manage to look at themselves in a new way. Here and there people — a very few people, but a few novelists are among them — are trying to do this. Every institution and vested interest is against such a search: organized religion, the State, the family in its economic aspect, have nothing to gain, and it is only when outward prohibitions weaken that it can proceed; history conditions it to that extent. (Forster 2005 155)

The last two aspects, pattern and rhythm, are explained from the concept of painting and music. The pattern is the artistic appeal in the novel. As Forster points out; “But, whereas the story appeals to our curiosity and the plot to our intelligence, the pattern appeals to our aesthetic sense, it causes us to see the book as a whole” (Forster 2005 135). Forster believes that novelists should allow their plots to grow organically to create pattern in novels. They should be aware of the rigid pattern which springs from the plot but
forget about the real life of the characters. He states the disadvantage of a rigid pattern. “It may externalize the atmosphere, spring naturally from the plot, but it shuts the doors on life and leaves the novelist doing exercises, generally in the drawing-room. Beauty has arrived, but in too tyrannous a guise” (Forster 2005 148). Finally, Forster explained rhythm in a musical context. Childs (2001) reviews this part of the book; “Forster, and his critics, have used the term “rhythm” to denote the structural use of leitmotifs or ‘repetitions with variation’ in fiction which depends upon expanding symbols. ‘Rhythm’ then refers to the repeated use of phrases, words, incidents, or characters to create a rhythmic effect in the evolution of a text's themes” (1).

Hence, the current study aims at presenting an overview of the critical scene in the 20th Century and highlighting the role of E.M. Forster as a critic of great importance and a theorist of English fiction. Michael Gordon (1997) states the importance of Forster and his book *The Aspects of the Novel*:  

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), the best-known book on fiction from the period, E. M. Forster is
deliberately far less systematic than Lubbock; hence the title "aspects," which eschews "principles and systems" (15) and is "unscientific and vague, because it leaves the maximum of freedom" (16). "Aspects" is also far less prescriptive, since for Forster "method" means not the specific question of point of view--unlike Lubbock, he claims that "a novelist can shift his viewpoint if it comes off" (56)--but rather "the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says" (78-79).

Forster has a post-modernist vision related to his critical reflection on the English fiction. His study of the different aspects of the novel represents his vision of creating an ideal text. The significance of this text seems to have increased with time, yet it has received less attention than it deserves by the major scholars of modern literature. This text represents a sound intellectual engagement in modern criticism. Forster tries to represent an over whole and paradoxical vision of the future reality of the theory of fiction. He presents some sort of criticism to help the readers with interpretative methods to read English fiction. This text is prophetic because a century after its publication,
it is still read and analyzed in the world of modern criticism. Forster in his book presents a challenging comparative method of criticism. He criticized fiction writers of the past to make some clues to the future novel writers. This book has a contemporary critical goal which is to educate and enlighten fiction writers of the future. The book acts as a guide line to future fiction writers. Mary Lago (2000) clarifies:

He would have been pleased, I think, to know that so many younger-generation writers are drawn, not only to the novels, but also to the non-fiction, the letters, and the journals—which contain much, much more than the expression of occasional discouragement. Would he now find some of our ideas about him and his work naive and even faintly amusing? Perhaps, --- But that, I think, he would have understood. The great thing is that he encouraged us to be thoughtful; to judge our own works more rigorously; and, above all, to value the sound old sentiments that gather all solutions under the headings of love and kindness. (146)

In short, Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* is full of wonderful criticism of novelists like Austen, Scott,
Dostoevsky and others. He structures his book to discuss the fundamental aspects of fiction. This text represents the most important critical discussion of the theory of fiction during the 20th century. The argument in the book is systematic and comprehensive. It is presented in an interesting dialogical style. The book’s conversational style makes it full of enjoyment. Critics think that this book of criticism is some sort of meta-novel by E. M. Forster. In addition, the book presents some sort of personal criticism similar to some critical works by David Lodge, T. S. Eliot, Samuel Johnson and Mathew Arnold. Forster’s book can be added to such lists as a work of post-modern criticism to be a guide in the world of modern theory of fiction. In general the importance of Aspects of the Novel as a book of criticism falls into the judgments readers form while trying to understand it as a comprehensive text, presenting a comprehensive theory. As a result, this study offers only a post-modern reading of Forster's text, which introduces a thorough description of the different aspects of the novel. The study stresses this book as a work of a systematic manipulation of criticism of the modern fiction writers.
Works Cited


