



13 Ways of Looking at the Novel

By Jane Smiley

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Over an extraordinary twenty-year career, Jane Smiley has written all kinds of novels: mystery, comedy, historical fiction, epic. “Is there anything Jane Smiley cannot do?” raves *Time* magazine. But in the wake of 9/11, Smiley faltered in her hitherto unflagging impulse to write and decided to approach novels from a different angle: she read one hundred of them, from classics such as the thousand-year-old *Tale of Genji* to recent fiction by Zadie Smith, Nicholson Baker, and Alice Munro.

Smiley explores—as no novelist has before her—the unparalleled intimacy of reading, why a novel succeeds (or doesn’t), and how the novel has changed over time. She describes a novelist as “right on the cusp between someone who knows everything and someone who knows nothing,” yet whose “job and ambition is to develop a theory of how it feels to be alive.”

In her inimitable style—exuberant, candid, opinionated—Smiley invites us behind the scenes of novel-writing, sharing her own habits and spilling the secrets of her craft. She walks us step-by-step through the publication of her most recent novel, *Good Faith*, and, in two vital chapters on how to write “a novel of your own,” offers priceless advice to aspiring authors.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel may amount to a peculiar form of autobiography. We see Smiley reading in bed with a chocolate bar; mulling over plot twists while cooking dinner for her family; even, at the age of twelve, devouring Sherlock Holmes mysteries, which she later realized were among her earliest literary models for plot and character.

And in an exhilarating conclusion, Smiley considers individually the one hundred books she read, from *Don Quixote* to *Lolita* to *Atonement*, presenting her own insights and often controversial opinions. In its scope and gleeful eclecticism, her reading list is one of the most compelling—and surprising—ever assembled.

Engaging, wise, sometimes irreverent, *Thirteen Ways* is essential reading for anyone who has ever escaped into the pages of a novel or, for that matter, wanted to write one. In Smiley’s own words, ones she found herself turning to over the course of her journey: “Read this. I bet you’ll like it.”

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13 Ways of Looking at the Novel By Jane Smiley Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #775793 in Books
- Published on: 2005-09-13
- Released on: 2005-09-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.51" h x 1.89" w x 6.63" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 608 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Plagued by a sense of despair while writing her last novel, *Good Faith*, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Smiley (*A Thousand Acres*, etc.) decided to return to the enterprise that got her started as a writer: reading. The result is a book that sets out to investigate the novel itself. Smiley does not offer a radically new way of seeing the novel. Instead, her study is methodical and cumulative, producing a wonderful text, opinionated but not argumentative, instructive but not heavily theoretical text. The book is roughly divided into three sections: the first classifies the novel, beginning with the most simple of definitions (e.g., it's long, in prose, has a protagonist), and adds moral and aesthetic complexity as it moves along. The second section consists of a primer for fledgling novelists. Here Smiley's years as a writing instructor show; her attitude toward all potential novelists is open-minded and generous, acknowledging the difficulty of the project while providing encouragement to continue. Finally, the book turns to the hundred novels she chose to read, from *The Tale of Genji* and *Don Quixote* to *White Teeth* and *Atonement*, devoting a few pages to a consideration of each. The result is a thorough reflection on the art and craft of the novel from one of its best-known contemporary practitioners. 50,000 first printing. (Sept. 15)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Critical opinion varies greatly on the discourse offered by this Pulitzer Prize winner on the biography and art of the novel. While some critics applaud her convictions on what makes a novel and a novelist, others feel she needs to exit the classroom and enter the minds of the mainstream reader. As the author of 11 novels who turned her attention to devouring books when she lost inspiration while writing *Good Faith* (**** July/Aug 2003) during 9/11, she has certainly done her homework. Perhaps the best way to bridge the disparity among reviewers is to say that at the very least, Smiley will enlighten, offer advice, and further the average reader's novelistic sensibilities, but she may also alienate the uninitiated fiction lover who reads mainly for pleasure.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review It hardly seems plausible that the prolific Pulitzer Prize-winning author suffered from a serious writing crisis in the wake of 9/11; yet that is what Smiley candidly reveals. What did she do to remedy the situation? Take to bed? Drink to excess? Read 100 novels? Smiley not only chose the reading cure but also launched a fresh inquiry into the novel's form, history, psychology, morality, and art, and the result is one of the most fluent, illuminating, and enjoyable studies of the novel ever assembled. Smiley dazzles the reader with nearly 300 pages of zestful analysis of the novel's structure, its "inherently political" nature, and the writing process. She then enhances her praise of the novel as a conduit for empathy in her pithy interpretations of the 100 novels chosen not because they are the "best" but because they are intriguing, works such as *The Tale of Genji*, *Don Quixote*, *Dracula*, *Lolita*, *Beloved*, and many surprises. Smiley's brilliant and bounteous critical feat and celebration of the novel's humanitarian spirit will kindle new appreciation for the form, and inspire more adventurous reading. Donna Seaman

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Andre Roop:

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or even read a book entitled 13 Ways of Looking at the Novel? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have different opinion?

Charles Carter:

The feeling that you get from 13 Ways of Looking at the Novel may be the more deep you rooting the information that hide into the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to know but 13 Ways of Looking at the Novel giving you excitement feeling of reading. The article writer conveys their point in a number of way that can be understood by means of anyone who read this because the author of this guide is well-known enough. That book also makes your own personal vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this 13 Ways of Looking at the Novel instantly.

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