The Longest Journey is more ambitious than the Italian novels Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with a View. In the Italian novels one finds a contrast between the English and the Italian approaches to life, the conventional and the instinctual respectively. In The Longest Journey, like Howards End and Maurice the structure of the plot is based on the contrast within the English society. Consequently communities and houses perform a more significant role than in the Italian novels. Like A Passage to India the novel has three divisions, "Cambridge", "Sawston" and "Wiltshire" which correspond to the three responses to life. The protagonist, Rickie's journey is an attempt to know the nature of reality. In Lionel Trilling's view The Longest Journey deals with the problem of appearance and reality:

It is indeed, one of the great themes of literature. It was what much of the Odyssey is about; Oedipus Rex and Don Quixote deal with it pre-eminently. It is Shakespeare's great subject in Hamlet, Othello and Lear ....1

John Colmer and Rex Warner also stress "reality" as one of the themes of the novel.2 Forster has touched upon other themes in the book which he was most glad to have written. In an article Forster writes about the novel thus:
The Longest Journey is the least popular of my five novels but the one I am glad to have written. For in it, I have managed to get nearer than elsewhere towards what was in 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. I can remember writing it and how excited I was and how absorbed, and how sometimes I went wrong deliberately, as if the spirit of anti-literature had jogged my elbow. For all its faults, it is the only one of my books that has come upon me without my knowledge. Elsewhere I have had to look into the lumber-room of my past, and have found in it things that were useful to be sure; still I found them, they didn't find me, and the magic sense of being visited and of even returning the visit was absent.

The idea of writing the novel came to Forster as early as 1904 and the story that he had in mind was about the "rescue" theme found in his Italian novels and in his incomplete fragment called "They are Nottingham lace!" The other themes related to the existence of an illegitimate brother, friendship among Cambridge students. Various other ideas also came to the author's mind between 1904 and 1907. Forster has discussed them to elaborate on the germination of the book's story:

There was the metaphysical idea of Reality ('the cow is there'): there was the ethical idea that reality must be faced (Rickie won't face Stephen); there was the idea, or the ideal of the British Public School; there was the title exhorting us in the words of Shelley not to love one person only; there was Cambridge, there was Wiltshire.

The original draft of the novel prepared by Forster on 17-7-1904 though identical with the printed book in
details, differs from it in certain crucial aspects. There was no reference to the young lame farmer whom Forster met on Figsbury Rings on 9th September 1904. He was also greatly impressed by the English countryside around Salisbury. The physical handicap in Rickie represents his homosexuality. It also represents the lack of vitality among liberal humanists in the novels of Lionel Trilling's The Middle of the Journey, Henry James' The Portrait of a Lady. The encounter with the spirit of the place at Figsbury Rings and the lame farmer has perceptibly enriched the novel. Not until Forster wrote Howards End, was the spirit of English countryside celebrated as sentimentally as in this novel.

Forster wanted to touch upon various themes in the novel. This has resulted in a lack of 'aesthetic compactness' one admires in Where Angels Fear to Tread or in Howards End. The novel begins with a discussion on the nature of reality and Rickie's inclination to relate his own symbolism to the experience offered by life. The Cambridge undergraduates discuss the central problem of European philosophy regarding "reality", is reality in the object or in the mind of the perceiver?

Rickie's habit to invest his experience with symbols prevents him from understanding the true nature of objects and persons. His admiration for Agnes Pembroke and the
subsequent decision to marry her stem from this weakness in him. When he picks up an argument with Ansell for the latter's mad's behaviour towards Agnes, Ansell replies:

Did it never strike you that phenomena may be of two kinds: one, those which have a real existence, such as the cow, two, those which are the subjective product of a diseased imagination and which to our destruction, we invest with the semblance of quality?8

The appearance of Agnes at the undergraduates' meeting accompanied by the strains of 'Das Rheingold' charms Rickie. He sees her not only as a handsome girl, but 'like an empress' (LJ p.24). Ansell tries to explain to Rickie the true meaning of reality by drawing a diagram of squares and circles. When Rickie asks whether they are real, Ansell replies, "The inside one is - the one in the middle of everything, that there's never room enough to draw"89 Ansell's diagram resembles a mandala, an age-old symbol of unity and harmony in the material and the phenomenal worlds. According to John Sayre Martin:

The circles symbolising - as in Christian iconography- the celestial and the visionary, and the squares the mundane and the practical, the total configuration points to Rickie's desire for a total, integrated reality.10

The difficulty with Rickie is, in the words of Wilfred Stone, that he '.... reads his own experience not pragmatically but symbolically"11 Rickie tells Agnes;
It seems to me that here and there in life we meet with a person or incident that is symbolical. It's nothing in itself, yet for the moment it stands for some eternal principle. We accept it, at whatever cost, and we have accepted life. But if we are frightened and reject it, the moment, so to speak, passes, the symbol is never offered again.12

There is a good deal of identity between Rickie and Rickie's childhood, like Forster's, makes him turn upon himself and he develops his imagination. It is quite natural for a lame and solitary child like him, who has only his mother to give him company. Forster was also brought up by his grandmother and maid servants. Like Rickie Forster always longed for male companionship. Rickie, according to Martin, "...is more at home in the world of fantasy than fact."13 Like his creator, he writes short stories "Pan pipes" in which young girls turn into trees. (As in Forster's story - "The other Kingdom"). He would conduct solitary conversations with pretended brothers and friends. The sight of real brothers and friends makes him sob. Reality for him consists of two aspects, the inner and the outer, which ideally should be integrated.

Life at Cambridge, after a miserable life at the school where he was bullied by Gerald Dawes is full of joy for him. Rooms and sequestered dells are his heaven. They protect him from a harsh world. Forster too would behave like this when he was at school.14 According to Jung, the desire to hide in dells is the desire to hide in the mother. Such a person cannot attain maturity for he cannot break out of the magic
hold of such feelings. This back-to-the womb pattern, it may be noted, is the exact opposite of D.H. Lawrence's theme in *Sons and Lovers*, in which Paul Morel frees himself from his mother and moves on towards life. The difficulty with Rickie, in the words of K.W. Gransden, is the failure to grow up.15

Cambridge and the dell in the first section stand for a happy and joyful life. Rickie and his friends are "full of the wine of life" and are yet to taste "the teacup of experience" (LJ: p.66) K.W. Gransden believes that the book "...cries for the wine of life" and rejects the innumerable teacups" of experience".16 Friendship, affection and truth flourish in Cambridge, the Cambridge of G.E. Moore. Cambridge has the power to "Soothe" and "warm" the unfortunate boys who "crept cold" "friendless" and "ignorant" from a public school. It provides the congenial soil for personal relations to take root and grow. There the boys care for "truth" rather than for "victory" or personal contests and personal influence.

Like Fielding in *A Passage to India*, Rickie doesn't believe in groups and sets among his friends. One of Forster's "Apostle" friends, Sheppard touched upon the two different attitudes towards sets and the question of including in and
excluding some people from one's group, in a paper read by him in 1903. The two classes in Cambridge were divided into the Trinity and the King's. The Trinity attitude was "stern, arrogant, intolerant, generally rather unamiable". On the other hand the King's set believed in "value and interest of human beings". Trinity believed in exclusion, and the King's in inclusion of all. Ansell in *The Longest Journey* represents the Trinity attitude and Rickie that of the King's. Rickie at this time was a great admirer of Shelley's poem *Epipsychidium* from which the novel derives its title. Shelley exhorts us not to confine ourselves to one person (wife) only along the path of the longest journey of life. But under the inimical influence of Herbert Pembroke and Agnes Pembroke, Rickie changes his attitude and looks upon Shelley's poem as "a little inhuman" (*LJ* p.133). He loses his sense of reality and truth before he is eventually guided by Ansell and Stephen towards reality. Rex Warner underlines Rickie's collapse into unreality and the emergence into the light as a very important theme of the novel:

The main theme of the book appears to be Rickie's collapse into unreality (as represented by his wife Agnes and the public school world of Sawston) and his emergence again into the light under the guidance of his Cambridge friend Ansell and his half brother Stephen.18

Rickie's friendship with Ansell (Forster had a friend called Ansell in his childhood with whom he was allowed to
play once a week) and his horseplay with him throw more light on homosexuality after the posthumous publication of Forster's Maurice (1971) and the collection of stories, with the element of homosexuality, The Life to Come (1972).

Rickie laughed, and suddenly overbalanced into the grass. Ansell, with unusual playfulness, held him prisoner. They lay there for a few minutes, talking and ragging aimlessly .... and it pleased him that morning to be with his friend.19

If we juxtapose the overt playfulness of Clive in Maurice and the ragging between Lionel March and Coconut in "The other Boat", between Paul Primay and the native young king in "The Life to Come", the homosexual overtones stand self-explained. Perhaps that explains Ansell's objection to Rickie's marriage with Agnes, that "....You are not a person who ought to marry at all. You are unfitted in body" (LJ, p.86) Wilfred Stone, analysing the use of high flown poetic passages by Forster, thinks that the author's intention was to keep away the reader's attention from such covert homosexuality. He writes:

Did he have something to hide, some "scandal" from which the reader's attention might be deflected by these irritating decoys? Or did he perhaps not want readers looking too closely at Rickie as an authorial self-portrait?20.
According to Stone, *The Longest Journey* falls under the tradition of *Künstlerroman*, the modern literature of self-confessions and is like Joyce's *Portrait of a Young Man as an Artist*, and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*. 

Rickie leaves Cambridge and decides to take up some work. Margaret in *Howards End* admires the Wilcoxes because they work hard and their industry contributes to national wealth. According to Walter Houghton, the most popular word next to "God", was "work", and it had an ideal of service attached to it. 

Before his departure from Cambridge, two incidents take place which have great symbolical significance for Rickie, "the incurable symboliser" (Martin, p.41). He marries Agnes Pembroke in the teeth of opposition from Ausell for whom she does not "exist", because in his view (1) she is not serious and (2) she is not truthful. But Rickie who has not forgotten her in the arms of Gerald Dawes, wants to experience the mortal passion and the peace and comfort of a married life with such a charming lady.

Angus Wilson, like many other readers, was charmed by her when she first entered the room of Rickie. But Forster had "seen through her "as he told Angus Wilson in an interview. When Wilson told Forster that he could not help being fond of Agnes, Forster asked him sharply:
"Why are you"?
(trying to excuse himself)
"There was something moving when she first came to Rickie's room ...."
E.M.F. "I saw through her".24

Likewise Ansell also sees through her and advises Rickie not to marry her. Rickie's decision is symbolical as well as moral. He makes a choice and suffers as a result of it. For Rickie there exists a peculiar relationship between the moment of vision (the embrace of Agnes and Gerald), and the moment of moral choice (His decision to marry Agnes as he is impressed by her and Gerald's virility). The second incident relates to the revelation by aunt Emily that Stephen Wonham is his brother. Stephen is the son of Rickie's mother and her lover Robert, a farmer in Salisbury. Robert belonged to the earth and hence was a straightforward, passionate and truthful person. Forster is tender to him,

As he talked, the earth became a living being — or rather a being with a living skin — and manure no longer dirty stuff, but a symbol of regeneration and the birth of life from life.25

Mrs. Emily, who derives great pleasure in making people uncomfortable, takes revenge on her nephew by telling him that Stephen is his brother. The "symbolical moment" again presented itself to Rickie at Cadbury Rings, which are based on Figsbury Rings. The place, where the truth was revealed, was like Ansell's "Squares and Circles".
The bank of grass where he had sat was broken by a gap, through which chariots had entered and farm carts entered now. The track, following the ancient track, let straight through turnips to a similar gap in the second circle and thence continued through more turnips, to the central tree.

The Cadbury Rings resemble the original Figsbury Rings visited by Forster in 1904:

- Figsbury Rings are Iron Age earthworks lying between Salisbury and Porton, consisting of a double embankment, with crops between, and in the centre, a single small tree.

Forster and Rickie both experience something of momentous significance under the tree. Rickie, who speaks to Agnes about symbolic moments, is prepared to accept Stephen as his brother, but Agnes prevents him. She, like Charlotte in *A Room with a View*, blots out the reality from Rickie's view. Agnes persuades him to consider Stephen as "illicit, abnormal, worse than a man deceased". (LW p.145) Rickie looks upon Stephen as the son of his father whom he hates. He is glad to reject the symbolic moment, "Stephen was the fruit of sin; therefore he was sinful. He, too, because a sexual snob".

The young Cambridge Scholar who has never drunk becomes conventional, and consequently "...the heart of all things was hidden." (LW p.150). His stories are rejected by the publishers and Ansell corresponds with him no longer. It is his "collapse into unreality" described by Rex Warner. He
takes up a job at a school 'Dunwood', run by Agnes's brother Herbert Pembroke. In the words of the author, "Dunwood House reeks of commerce and snobbery and all things he hated most." The Dunwood House is based on Tonbridge school attended by Forster. Herbert Pembroke as the organiser of the school is based on Rev. 'Joey' Wood, its headmaster. Mr. Jackson, the agnostic teacher who is popular with students but cannot keep discipline is based on Isaac Smedley. Rickie stoops to deceit and cruelty in persecuting a day boy Varden. Such schools, according to Forster, are responsible for producing young boys with "undeveloped hearts though they are strong physically." Rickie, hated by the students as an "officious Limpet" becomes miserable. He even feels grateful for having rejected his own brother. He tells her:

I am changing. I am beginning to see that the world has many people in it who don't matter. I had time for them once. Not now.

He adds, "You're changing me .... God less you for it" (LJ. p.131). In this happy mood he again crosses the Roman Crossing where a child had been killed earlier. Like a beautiful Forsterian rhythm it waxes and wanes. The central tree comes into his view where he was told the 'real' thing which he had rejected earlier. The conventions of the Dunwood House claim him. Forster comments:
'Rickie's programme involved a change in values as well as a change of occupation.'

The 'Sawston' section is an indictment of the public schools which hamper natural growth of the children. Herbert Pembroke is criticised for introducing inhuman innovations that divide children among groups and 'Houses'. According to the author such a person would be rejected by "Humanity and such other tribunals" (LJ p.170). As "cloud of unreality" broods over Rickie at Sawston, Ausell (based on Ainsworth and H.O. Meredith) is busy in the quest of truth in the Reading Room of the British Museum where the sitting arrangements remind us of "squares and circles" and the "central tree".

He loved the chairs that glide so m noiselessly, and the radiating desks, and the central area, where the catalogue shelves curve round the Superintendent's throne.33

He tries to find the 'Spirit of life' through books, whereas Stephen finds it out of doors in the country. Ausell according to J.B. Beer,


....stands throughout the novel as an embodiment of one virtue to be found at times in Cambridge - the disinterested pursuit of truth.34

On the other hand Rickie is lost in the Dunwood House a place of 'Sham food, sham religion, sham straight talks..."
"Sawston" section is important, for Forster discusses public and private themes in it. The public theme is concerned with the education of an Englishman and the future of England, the private theme relates to Rickie's quest for truth. But because Rickie ignores reality by ignoring the symbolic moment, he has to suffer a great deal. He belongs to the 'great sect' indicted by Shelley and selects a "mistress" out of the world, and commends "the fair" (Stephen) and "wise" (Ansell) to cold oblivion. Because of his action he goes alone, "The dreariest and the longest journey" (LJ, p.133). D.H. Lawrence in Women in Love also criticises the way the married couples shut themselves in their own life and forget the world. Rickie, who is gifted with imagination and who is basically a humanist, at times sees through his dreary marriage and the drab existence at the Sawston school. He is cursed with the 'Primal Curse', says Forster: "... which is not - as the Authorised version suggests - the knowledge of good and evil, but the knowledge of good - and- evil."

Rickie is gifted with the faculty to acknowledge the "other side of things" (LJ p.175). Under the influence of the Pembroke he cursed himself for clear-sightedness. His cry of 'come' to Ansell from the prison of Dunwood House moves Ansell and he visits Rickie. The death of his lame daughter makes him
more miserable and he thinks of the cruelty of nature and compares human beings with the bubbles of water. The bubbles break" .... and the stream continues." (LJ p.195) Throughout the book Forster refers to water, streams and the sea. They are "rhythms" which bind the book from inside. Stephen, Rickie thinks, will contribute to the stream. The theme of continuity is thus stressed by Forster which is one of the important themes he uses in his novels.

Apsell and Stephen meet outside Rickie's house. Apsell comes in response to Rickie's letter to save him, and Stephen comes to break the news about their brotherhood. Apsell is impressed by the cloudless spirit of Stephen. "Certain figures of the Greeks".... suggested him a little".(LJ p.217) Gerald Dawes, the bully and with whom Agnes was engaged had a body of a Greek but the face of an Englishman. Agnes offers Stephen money to keep him silent about his discovery that Rickie is his brother. She is worried about the scandal it might create. Stephen goes away throwing the cheque in her face. He would 'sooner die than take money from people he did not love" (LJ, p.229). The young farmer's son whom Forster had met also refused money offered by Forster. The theme of money offered as a substitute for love recurs in Forster's novels. Rickie offers Gerald and Agnes money to marry. Helen in Howards End offers thousands of pounds to
Leonard Bast but like Stephen he refused. Forster had to accept money from Aunt Marriane whom he did not love. Stephen surprises the Pembrokes by refusing money. Ansell enters the school and tells Rickie that Stephen was his mother's son and not his father's son. Rickie has been offered a symbolic moment again. He accepts it and he accepts life. But he looks upon Stephen as a symbol of his beloved mother as Pembrokes look upon Stephen as a symbol of scandal. Stephen throws stones at their house breaking the window glass. It is a blow for the nature (brick) and a blow against convention. One is reminded of the "chalk" of Rickie's dell. Rickie is taken on a "journey" by Ansell. It is not a dreary one like his journey with Aques. It is a journey that gives him reality and truth. He stood behind right and wrong (LJ p. 250) He accepts Stephen, "the spirit of the seventeen days in which he was created" and "the child of poetry and rebellion" (LJ p. 242).

Rickie breaks with Aques and the school that had corrupted his soul and joins Stephen. It is spring time in nature. It was autumn when Rickie met Aques in his own Cambridge rooms. Rickie is happy again. But he looks upon Stephen as a symbol of their beloved mother. He cannot take him as his brother with all his faults. He is pained when Stephen is drunk. But Stephen asks him not to "...hang on me clothes that don't belong" (LJ p.266) Rickie even writes
a story "About a man and a woman who meet and are happy" (LJ. p.275) He visits his aunt and absentmindedly drops a lump of chalk on the coffee-cup. Forster indicates the triumph of Nature over false conventions. The chalk of the dell recurs in a rhythmic manner to give a sense of unity to the book.

Rickie and Stephen are happy again in Cadover, but Rickie is shocked when Stephen breaks his promise to drink and sprawls across the Roman Railway crossing. Rickie rushes to help him and is run over by the train. He dies leaving behind Stephen to contribute to the stream of life by bringing for the children who will keep the memory of Rickie's mother awake.

Stephen lives happily with his wife and daughter. The collection of Rickie's short stores is quite popular. The bridge on the Roman crossing has been built at last. About the rhythmic use of the leitmotif of the Roman crossing, Peter Burra writes; "The sense of completion is extraordinary".37

According to K.W. Gransden, the three sections of the book, "Cambridge", "Sawston", and "Wiltshire" are like three blocks of a symphony corresponding to the statement, crisis and resolution of the thematic structure. The rhythmic use
of the Roman Railway Crossing, chalk, the streams, rivers and
the sea, squares and circles, the photograph of Demeter
bind the book from inside. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*
discusses the use of rhythm which stitches a book from
inside:

> There are times when it means nothing and is forgotten,
> and this seems to me the function of rhythm in fiction,
> not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by
> its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise
> and freshness.38

Though the book is well planned, there are incidents that
are "loose ends" which Forster thinks the novelists should
avoid. (*Aspects of the Novel* p.95). Stephen's ride with the
soldier does not contribute to the development of the plot.
Details regarding Aunt Emily's mismanagement of her estate
could have been minimized.

Forster wanted to write about many things in this novel,
which Gransden describes as "... a book of youth, and has
youthful faults: but it has also a youthful virtue...."39.
There is undoubtedly some confusion in the structure of the
novel. But the final impression of the novel is more unified
than the criticism of John Harvey or Lionel Trilling would
lead one to expect. Though everything is not in the exact
place which its surroundings require as Forster admires in
Ibsen,39 one can say that the great imaginative scenes in
the book cohere in the memory more firmly than John Harvey
suggests.
The journey motif is not only recurrent but is central in E.M. Forster. Journey is a quest, a quest of culture and through the encounters with the foreign lands and people to realise some sort of identity, even self-search. Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested in *A Passage to India* travel to India, Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View* travel in Italy. Journey is not necessarily to a foreign land, but, as in *Howards End*, *The Longest Journey*, and *Maurice*, the characters travel within England and encounter new experiences, meet people and learn something new that lies beyond the normal range of their experience. On the other hands there are characters who remain unaffected by the experience in foreign lands. Such people are Harriet in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* or the British officers in *A Passage to India*.

E.M. Forster invests the journey theme with a significant symbolical significance. The journey is a quest, but more than a quest it signifies in the larger philosophical sense the journey of life. We all travel from the cradle to the grave along the life's path.

The journey theme at the hands of writers like E.M. Forster acquires both spatial and temporal dimensions, all leading to a larger vision of life. Life as a journey evokes the vision of some mysterious, eternal flux. In that
ceaseless movement there is not only inescapable mutability but also some sort of ending. For like all journeys the journey of life has a beginning and an end as terminals, of some perennial sense of flux in between.

The characters in his novels and short stories are pulled in contrary directions as a result of the journey: toward the new experience that journey brings and toward their own world of familiar norms and values. In their divided impulses these travellers are like those in romantic allegory. Like Christian in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s progress* or Spencer’s Sir Guyon, Forster’s characters are subject to forces that help or impede them in their quest. Such forces are, the external counterparts of elements in their own natures. But Forster’s travellers differ from the figures in allegory. They are highly individualised are not at least in the conventional sense, heroic. But like the central figures in romantic allegory, Forster’s travellers are in search of fulfilment and are subjected in the course of their journey to forces (characters, places et.) that help or impede them. As in the traditional allegories these forces are conceived in antithetical terms. On the one hand such forces as Sawston, public schools. Herbert Pembroke check the receptiveness of the travellers to what is new, on the other, Italy, Cambridge and Stephen Wonham are forces that invite them to discover and fulfil what is new within himself.
THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Foot Notes:


3. E.M. Forster, "Aspects of a Novel"
   The Bookseller, September 10, 1960, p.1230

4. P.N. Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,

5. ibid p.118


9. ibid, p.23


12. The Longest Journey, p.142


16. ibid, p.38

17. P.N. Furbank, op. cit, pp.105-107


19. The Longest Journey, p.70.


21. ibid, p.187

22. ibid, p.204

23. The Longest Journey, p.87


25. The Longest Journey, p.232

26. ibid, p.134


28. The Longest Journey, p.145

29. ibid, p.183

30. P.N. Furbank, op.cit. p.43


32. The Longest Journey p.128

33. ibid, p.180
35. *The Longest Journey*, p.175
36. *ibid*, p.288

37. Peter Burra, "The Novels of E.M. Forster"
   *Twentieth century views*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury

38. E.M. Forster *Aspects of the Novel* (Middlesex: Penguin books Ltd., 1927) p.188
