



THE LONG JOURNEY OF E M FORSTER



“She obeyed, and crept into his arms. Only this time her grasp was the stronger.

*Her heart beat louder and louder as the sound of his grew more faint.
He was crying like a little frightened child, and her lips were wet with his tears.”*

THE LONGEST JOURNEY:

“Will it really profit us so much if we save our souls and lose the whole world?”

Said to be E.M. Forster’s own favourite of all his novels – and the most autobiographical – *The Longest Journey* was published in 1907 and is described by Forster as the one he is ‘most glad to have written’.

Set in the early years of the twentieth century, it tells the story of Rickie Elliot, a young man forced to abandon his hopes, dreams and passions through a compulsion to ‘do the right thing’. Trapped in a world of petty conformity and a loveless marriage, his life descends into failure and eventually tragedy. But his life-story – the ‘longest journey’ of the title – ends with a hopeful, if sadly ironic, twist.

‘It is all ingenious symbols, little flesh & blood.’

The essence of the novel is a story of compromise and redemption, passion and its suppression, the price of vision and imagination in a conformist world, diffidence and the price paid for it, feelings of inferiority, the possession of an inherited curse and ultimately the failure of Rickie in his lived life to express the truths he knew as a young man.

In the end, through self-sacrifice Rickie brings about new life and his own posthumous success as a writer.

THE FILM

Forster wrote *The Longest Journey* in 1907, before his full adult life had started. The film reflects Forster’s view that this book, above all his books, describes what he felt was to happen to him in his own life.

‘Nothing more great will come out of me ...

I may sit year after year in my pretty sitting room, watching things grow more unreal ...’

We trace Forster’s growing recognition both his development as a writer and of his homosexuality and his need to initiate himself into his own true nature. We understand Forster’s extraordinary sexual shyness and diffidence in his youth and his sexual promiscuity after his great success with *A Passage to India*.



'However gross my desires, I fear I shall never satisfy them for annoying others.'

Through interviews with his biographers and literary critics, the film traces the resonances in Forster's life that are intimated in the novel. We learn of his lovers and his final long relationship with Bob Buckingham, the good-looking policeman, in whose wife's arms Forster died.

'I am happier now than ever in my life, and I hope that if anyone reads this book he will get to this. Aged 55.'

'How few are left to be loved.'

The Longest Journey is a book about the search for redemption in a creative life half lived and a creative life betrayed upon the altar of self-seeking convention. This is a modern story that sets out most clearly the premonitions that Forster continued to have about his own life.

'I hope my books - such sense and warmth as there is in them - will not be forgotten.'

BACKGROUND TO THE FILM:

My own interest in E M Forster's novel *The Longest Journey* started when I read the book at university and thought it was the best novel I had ever read. There were other reasons to read the book. In 1966 most days for a year I saw E M Forster and said, "good morning" to him as I went to breakfast. I lived on the floor above him in King's College, Cambridge.

Previously I had avoided reading E M Forster but my interest was drawn by *Howards End*. Reading *The Longest Journey* was a revelation. I was to live in my third year at King's in college in rooms W7 in Bodley's Court. This I was to discover had been E M Forster's own rooms when he was an undergraduate at King's in 1897.

The first two chapters of *The Longest Journey* are set in these rooms. Whether reality exists at all is decided by E M Forster through the view from the window of W7.

I saw E M Forster as usual one morning and instead of just saying "Good Morning" I said "I must talk to you. *The Longest Journey* is the best book I have ever read." Forster looked at me very closely and then told me it was the favourite of his own books.

Feeling the connection, I then said, "Can I buy you a drink." Forster said "Yes ... you are the first person to offer to buy me a drink for thirty years." We went to the college bar and got talking. Other events followed. We restarted together the 10 Club that Forster had started in 1897 and continued to discuss *The Longest Journey*.





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