Eastern Questions
Peter Jeffreys

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Peter Jeffreys holds degrees from Hellenic College, Boston College, and the University of Toronto, where he received a Ph.D. in English Literature. He is currently a Senior Lecturer at Suffolk University in Boston.
WHAT IS the relationship between E. M. Forster’s quintessentially British novels, stories and essays and the abstrusely historical and erotic musings of the Greek poet C. P. Cavafy? The answer is both complex and illuminating.

The apparent differences are bridged by Forster’s penchant for antiquities and interest in matters Oriental, by Cavafy’s Anglophilia and British education. While these facts have generated comparative criticism that places novelist and poet in a Hellenistic continuum, the scholarly discussion to date has overlooked the ideological tensions that separate these two important modernists along a cultural divide. Hellenism is a way into their shared interests in the classical past, yet it also marks a point of dissension regarding the essence of Greek civilization. Similarly, their Orientalist visions led them to radically diverse configurations of the East.

Dr. Jeffrey’s parallel reading of Forster and Cavafy explains not only how Forster and Cavafy were both rooted in Western Hellenism, but also how their suppositions about it diverged significantly and how the two confronted the Orient in quite different ways. New light is also cast on their friendship; their different political views may have impeded its development.

*Eastern Questions: Hellenism and Orientalism in the Writings of E.M. Forster and C.P. Cavafy* makes use of unpublished, newly edited unfinished poetry (here made available for the first time to an English readership), and lesser-known texts, both fictional and nonfictional. The exchange between literary and nonliterary texts, prose and poetry, focuses the ideological center of Forster’s lifelong engagement with Greece and India and identifies the essence of Cavafy’s prolonged fixation on matters Hellenic. In the process Jeffrey’s New Historicism study applies contemporary critical trends in modern Greek studies to Forster criticism, producing a fresh reading of the relationship and the Cavafy and Forster canons.