



**"A Mutual Hellenism," excerpt from new book on Cavafy, Eastern Questions: HELLENISM AND ORIENTALISM IN THE WRITINGS OF E. M. FORSTER AND CONSTANTINE CAVAFY**

**by Peter Jeffreys**

"A Mutual Hellenism" is an excerpt from the first chapter of a new book on C. P. Cavafy and E. M. Forster. It discusses their shared Western Hellenism and outlines the sources from which they drew their early literary inspiration.

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Eastern Questions: Hellenism and Orientalism in the Writings of E. M. Forster and C. P. Cavafy, published by ELT Press (2005), explores 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 apparent differences are bridged by Forster's penchant for antiquities and interest in matters Oriental and 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. Jeffreys'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Eastern Questions makes use of unpublished documents, newly edited unfinished poetry (here made available for the first time to an English readership), and lesser-known texts, both fictional and non-fictional. The exchange between literary and non-literary 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 Jeffreys's New Historicist study applies contemporary critical trends in Modern Greek studies to Forster criticism, producing an incisive, fresh reading of the relationship and the Cavafy and Forster canons.