

## Introduction

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### History from the inside-out

“History . . . is made up of episodes,” E. P. Thompson once wrote, “and if we cannot get inside these we cannot get inside history at all.”<sup>1</sup> Thompson was emphasizing careful attention to particular episodes, attention that in turn has the potential to revise understandings of the larger histories into which those episodes fit. This book follows Thompson’s injunction by attempting to “get inside” a notorious episode in British history: the “two cultures” controversy in the early 1960s. By examining the origins, content, and context of this controversy, I argue that what has previously been read as a *disciplinary* dispute about the arts and the sciences was actually an *ideological* conflict between competing visions of Britain’s past, present, and future. This interpretation, in turn, revises our understandings of the other discussions that intersected with the controversy – and, from this perspective, the “two cultures” debate has the advantage of touching upon some of the most contentious issues in postwar British history. The expansion of the universities, the development of social history, anxieties about national decline, debates about the former empire, and the meaning of the 1960s all look different when their attendant claims for and against “science” are understood as parts of more ambitious arguments about the nature and direction of British – and human – society. On the broadest level, the “two cultures” controversy is a particular episode inside two larger histories: the relatively recent history of postwar Britain, and the longer tradition discussing the relationship between the arts and the sciences. Both of these histories, in fact, continue to be explained in terms that C. P. Snow employed in *The Two Cultures*: the history of postwar Britain as a story of decline, and discussions about the arts and the sciences as a conflict between two cultures. Rather than adopting these interpretations, this book revises them from the inside out – beginning with the “two cultures” controversy that was central to them both.

<sup>1</sup> E. P. Thompson, “The Peculiarities of the English,” *Socialist Register*, 1965, ed. Ralph Miliband and John Saville (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965), p. 338.

## 2 The Two Cultures Controversy

### “So curious a storm”

The outline of the controversy is straightforward. On May 7, 1959, the scientist-turned-novelist C. P. Snow delivered the annual Rede Lecture at Cambridge University. Snow took as his subject the relationship between literary and scientific intellectuals, and his address was entitled *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*.<sup>2</sup> Snow argued that literary intellectuals had long harbored animus towards science, technology, industry, and progress, and that as a result they were obstructing economic development throughout Asia and Africa. His lecture generated widespread discussion until February 1962, when the literary critic F. R. Leavis challenged Snow's thesis in another Cambridge lecture, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow*.<sup>3</sup> Leavis did not engage with Snow's thesis so much as question his stature, depicting the esteem that Snow enjoyed as a telling indication of a misguided society. Leavis's broadside transformed the “two cultures debate” into the “Snow–Leavis controversy,” but Snow refrained from replying for a year and a half. He eventually responded in the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) in October 1963, revisiting his thesis but only obliquely addressing Leavis.<sup>4</sup> During the next few years Leavis pressed his critique in a series of lectures at various universities: Harvard and Cornell in 1966, Wales in 1969, Bristol in 1970, and York in 1970 and 1971.<sup>5</sup> In 1970 Snow finally responded in another TLS essay, and shortly thereafter both Snow and Leavis collected and published their contributions to the “two cultures” debate.<sup>6</sup>

What this brisk outline does not convey is the polemical intensity that so charged the controversy. In his initial lecture, for instance, after expressing regret about the divisions between intellectuals, Snow swiftly proceeded to conflate Modernists with Nazis: he quoted a scientific

<sup>2</sup> C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1959).

<sup>3</sup> F. R. Leavis, “The Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow,” *Spectator*, 9 March 1962, pp. 297–303, reprinted, with an essay by Michael Yudkin, as *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> C. P. Snow, “The Two Cultures: A Second Look,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 October 1963, pp. 839–844, reprinted with the original lecture as *The Two Cultures: and A Second Look* (Cambridge University Press, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> F. R. Leavis, “Luddites? or, There Is Only One Culture”; “‘English’, Unrest and Continuity”; “‘Literarism’ versus ‘Scientism’: The Misconception and the Menace”; “Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope”; “Elites, Oligarchies and an Educated Public”; all published, along with “Two Cultures? The Significance of Lord Snow,” in *Nor Shall My Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> C. P. Snow, “The Case of Leavis and the Serious Case,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 July 1970, pp. 737–740, reprinted with related lectures and essays in *Public Affairs* (New York: Scribner's, 1971).

colleague with approval, “Didn’t the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?”<sup>7</sup> Leavis, for his part, began by questioning Snow’s status as a novelist, and went on to express doubt as to whether he possessed a mind at all: “The intellectual nullity is what constitutes any difficulty there may be in dealing with Snow’s panoptic pseudo-cogencies, his parade of a thesis: a mind to be argued with – that is not there.”<sup>8</sup> The arguments that spiraled beyond Snow and Leavis were no less contentious, as charges and countercharges flooded the *Spectator*: “Leavis,” declared one writer, “is the Himmler of Literature.”<sup>9</sup> Small wonder that the American literary critic Lionel Trilling, observing the affair with dismay from New York, referred to it all as “so curious a storm.”<sup>10</sup> Trilling was referring specifically to the uproar generated by Leavis’s intervention, but he might well have said the same about the entire “two cultures” controversy.

From that day to this, commentators and historians have sought to explain the controversy. One approach has adopted the terms that Snow himself provided, depicting the argument as a clash between “two cultures,” the arts and the sciences.<sup>11</sup> Snow argued that institutional positions combined with cultural prejudices to create a situation in which scientific and literary intellectuals would not – and increasingly could not – communicate with each other. He was speaking as a novelist, but had been trained as a scientist, and it became clear in his lecture that he favored the latter. Leavis declared this a slack formulation, but rather than demolishing Snow’s argument, his polemic came to be read as its ultimate confirmation. This interpretation figured prominently in the *Spectator* after it published Leavis’s text: for example, the physicist J. D. Bernal suggested, “If anything was needed to convince people of the truth and timeliness of the thesis of C. P. Snow’s *Two Cultures*, it would be Dr. Leavis’s lecture.”<sup>12</sup> Aldous Huxley expressed this characterization clearly (if inelegantly) when he posited symmetry between the “scientism” of Snow and the “literarism” of Leavis.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Snow, *The Two Cultures*, p. 7.    <sup>8</sup> Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> William Gerhardt, “Sir Charles Snow, Dr. F. R. Leavis, and the Two Cultures,” *Spectator*, 16 March 1962, p. 329. The debate carried on for the remainder of March: see Paul Boytinck, *C. P. Snow: A Reference Guide* (Boston: Hall, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Lionel Trilling, “Science, Literature, and Culture: A Comment on the Leavis-Snow Controversy,” *Commentary*, June 1962, p. 461.

<sup>11</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science* (London: Harper and Row, 1963); David K. Cornelius and Edwin St. Vincent, eds., *Cultures in Conflict: Perspectives on the Snow–Leavis Controversy* (Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1964). See also many of the contributions catalogued in Boytinck, *C. P. Snow: A Reference Guide*.

<sup>12</sup> J. D. Bernal, “Letters,” *Spectator*, 23 March 1962, p. 365.

<sup>13</sup> Huxley, *Literature and Science*, p. 1.

#### 4 The Two Cultures Controversy

Upon closer examination, however, the arguments and participants in the controversy refuse to align along disciplinary lines. Snow, after all, had not practiced science for nearly a quarter of a century, and when he delivered the Rede Lecture his stature rested upon his work as a novelist. His lecture called for a revolution in scientific education – not as an end in itself, but as part of an ambitious program of domestic modernization and global industrialization. Leavis, for his part, spent his career attacking not physicists and biologists but writers and critics, and his Richmond Lecture directed its fire not against Snow's proposals for science but at his stature as a novelist. The arts-versus-sciences dichotomy similarly fails to explain the positions in the wider debate: two of Snow's most trenchant critics were the physical chemist Michael Polanyi and the biochemist Michael Yudkin, while his defenders included the novelist William Gerhardt and the poet Edith Sitwell.<sup>14</sup> Leavis received support from scientists who were eager to distance themselves from Snow, but the literary establishment generally welcomed Snow's argument: *Encounter* ran the Rede Lecture in two parts, the BBC broadcast a version that summer, and the *TLS* endorsed Snow over Leavis.<sup>15</sup> Similar examples could be multiplied many times over, and together they suggest that these arguments amounted to more than routine defenses of disciplinary interests. Or, to put the point more sharply, the arts-versus-sciences dichotomy does not begin to bear the explanatory burden that has been placed upon it.

A second, and more productive, approach has situated the controversy in a longer tradition discussing the relationship between the arts and the sciences.<sup>16</sup> The exchange between Thomas Huxley and Matthew Arnold in the 1880s figures as a touchstone in these accounts. Huxley endorsed scientific education in an address in Birmingham in 1880, to

<sup>14</sup> Michael Polanyi, "The Two Cultures," *Encounter*, September 1959, pp. 61–64; Michael Yudkin, "Sir Charles Snow's Rede Lecture," originally published in the *Cambridge Review* and reprinted in Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, pp. 33–45; Gerhardt, "Sir Charles Snow, Dr. F. R. Leavis, and the Two Cultures," pp. 329–331; Edith Sitwell, *ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>15</sup> *Encounter* carried discussion of Snow's lecture in six of nine consecutive issues: June, July, August, September 1959, and January, February 1960. C. P. Snow, "The Imperatives of Educational Strategy," recorded 3 June 1959 and broadcast 8 September 1959, BBC WAC: MF T491; "A Question of Brains," *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 March 1962, p. 201.

<sup>16</sup> Trilling, "Science, Literature, and Culture;" Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Stefan Collini, "Introduction," in C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). On this tradition more generally, see David Hollinger, "The Knower and the Artificer," *American Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1987), pp. 37–55; Frank Miller Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

which Arnold responded in defense of humane letters in the Rede Lecture of 1882.<sup>17</sup> The route between Arnold's Rede Lecture of 1882 and Snow's Rede Lecture of 1959 is marked by a series of landmarks: in 1928 the Cambridge Union debated the proposition that "the sciences are destroying the arts"; in 1946 the BBC called the division between scientific and humanistic thought "the challenge of our time"; and by 1956 the polymath Jacob Bronowski had repeatedly addressed the subject in lectures and in print.<sup>18</sup> These prominent discussions were connected by less celebrated commentaries, and in the years preceding Snow's Rede Lecture the subject was ubiquitous. Consider this pastiche of quotations from the *Listener* between 1953 and 1959:

If there is almost no contact between science and philosophy, there is naturally still less between science and the other faculties of arts. We all live in our watertight compartments . . . [W]e must as a first and necessary step do what we can to establish a two-way traffic between the scientists on the one hand and the non-scientists on the other . . . The scientist needs to know more of general culture and the historian requires a better grounding in science . . . But the dichotomy between science and humanities is a false one . . . A 'scientist' without any knowledge of the various arts, history, philosophy, etc., is as much an incomplete personality as a 'humanist' without knowledge of the basic ideas, concepts, and methods of science . . . Let us help to provide a force that will overcome any inertia that is delaying our scientists and students of the arts from going forward together into the untravelled world.<sup>19</sup>

From this perspective, the exchange between Snow and Leavis figures as another contribution in a long-running conversation.

Yet this explanation has limitations as well. After all, the very existence of this tradition begs the question of how so familiar a subject could have ignited so contentious a debate. Stefan Collini offers one answer to that question: "[I]n this kind of cultural civil war," he explains, "each fresh engagement is freighted with the weight of past defeats, past

<sup>17</sup> T. H. Huxley, "Science and Culture," *Science and Education: Essays* (New York: D. Appleton, 1896), pp. 134–159; Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Science," *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), vol. X, pp. 53–73.

<sup>18</sup> Grace Wyndham-Goldie, *et al.*, *The Challenge of Our Time* (London: P. Marshall, 1948); Jacob Bronowski, *The Common Sense of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951); Bronowski, "Architecture as a Science and Architecture as an Art," *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal* 62 (March 1955), pp. 183–189; Bronowski, *Science and Human Values* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956). *The Common Sense of Science* was originally presented on the BBC's Third Programme in 1948, and *Science and Human Values* derived from a lecture series of 1953.

<sup>19</sup> All quotations derive from the *Listener* (in the order cited): 1 November 1956, p. 697; 19 November 1953, p. 846; 10 November 1955, p. 778; 21 November 1957, p. 845 (two quotations); 29 January 1959, p. 215.

6 The Two Cultures Controversy

atrocities; for this reason there is always more at stake than the ostensible cause of the current dispute.”<sup>20</sup> But if the historian or commentator is not sufficiently attentive to this dynamic, and fails to attend to the differences as well as the similarities between iterations in this tradition, they risk imposing a common interpretation upon very different episodes: Huxley and Arnold argued about the relative position of science and literature in education, so Snow and Leavis must have argued about the relative position of science and literature in education – despite that awkward bit when Snow implicated Modernists with Auschwitz.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, once Snow and Leavis are understood to have been re-enacting an earlier performance, their exchange can be dismissed as little more than an unfortunate departure from the script. The historian Dominic Sandbrook, for instance, suggests that their argument “really only amounted to a rehash of [the] much more genteel debate conducted between Matthew Arnold and T. H. Huxley in the 1880s,” while the literary scholar Alvin Kernan concludes, “Neither Snow nor Leavis . . . offered anything new to the long-standing and often-rehearsed argument between the poets and the philosophers.”<sup>22</sup> As a result of their efforts to identify the longer tradition into which Snow and Leavis fit, such accounts neglect the content and context of their particular exchange. It is necessary, therefore, not only to situate the controversy within a longer tradition, but also to dislodge it where appropriate from the confines of that tradition.<sup>23</sup>

So the controversy was charged by disciplinary tensions, and it somehow fits into a longer tradition, yet neither explanation sufficiently accounts for the arguments and energies of this particular episode. The fact of personal differences between Snow and Leavis is similarly unhelpful: after all, they had coexisted peacefully in and around Cambridge for more than three decades, and they both later denied the

<sup>20</sup> Collini, “Introduction,” p. xxxv.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson noted the “danger . . . that a model, even when flexibly employed, disposes one to look only at *certain* phenomena, to examine history for *conformities*, whereas it may be that the discarded evidence conceals new significances.” “The Peculiarities of the English,” p. 350. For further development of this point, see D. N. McCloskey, *If You're So Smart: The Narrative of Economic Expertise* (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), p. 50; Alvin Kernan, *In Plato's Cave* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> For a forceful articulation of the case against the presumption of intellectual continuity over time, see Mark Gregory Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245–1246* (Princeton University Press, 2001), especially Chapter 3, “Wedged between Catha and Cathay,” pp. 15–19.

existence of any enmity between them prior to the debate.<sup>24</sup> Why, then, did this familiar topic inspire such ferocious controversy in the early 1960s? The answer to that question leads beyond personal antipathies or disciplinary rivalries, and into the cultural politics of postwar Britain.

### Playing the stranger

This book offers a cultural history of the “two cultures” controversy. While it is informed by the work of social and intellectual historians, it resists the social historian’s inclination to read the debate as an expression of conflict between social classes or institutional interests, as well as the intellectual historian’s desire to identify genealogies of thinkers who grappled with related issues in different times or places.<sup>25</sup> Instead, by using the controversy to explore society and culture in postwar Britain, this book follows the approaches of cultural historians who seek to enter past cultures through those aspects that today seem unusual. In a classic account, for example, Robert Darnton takes the supposedly “hilarious” slaughter of a house full of cats as an opportunity to recover aspects of artisanal culture in Old Regime France. “When you realize that you are not getting something – a joke, a proverb, a ceremony – that is particularly meaningful to the natives,” he explains, “you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning in order to unravel it.”<sup>26</sup> Darnton might have added “a controversy” to his list, as Natalie Zemon Davis does when she suggests that “a remarkable dispute can sometimes uncover motivations and values that are lost in the welter of the everyday.”<sup>27</sup> The exchange between Snow and Leavis was one such dispute, one that was charged by – and is revealing of – the context and culture in which it took place.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> John Halperin, *C. P. Snow: An Oral Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), pp. 185–186; Ivar Alastair Watson, “‘The Distance Runner’s Perfect Heart’: Dr. Leavis in Spain,” *Cambridge Review*, November 1995, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Porter, “The Two Cultures Revisited,” *Cambridge Review*, November 1994, pp. 74–80; Guy Ortolano, “Two Cultures, One University: The Institutional Origins of the ‘Two Cultures’ Controversy,” *Albion* 34 (Winter 2002), pp. 606–624; Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science*.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre, and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage, 1985), pp. 77–78; this example derives from Chapter 2, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin,” pp. 75–104.

<sup>27</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> This approach follows the influential example of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz: “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” *Daedalus* (Winter 1971), pp. 1–38; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Geertz’s impact across various fields, including anthropology, literary studies, and history, is the subject of “The Fate of ‘Culture’: Geertz and Beyond,” ed. Sherry B. Ortner,



## 8 The Two Cultures Controversy

Darnton and Davis are early modern historians, but their emphasis upon the unfamiliar is particularly instructive for the historian of the recent past. The historical method is a matter of approach as much as subject, and key to that approach is the perspective afforded by distance. It is difficult enough for historians to establish interpretive distance from the Protestant Reformation or the French Revolution, but that problem is compounded when the object of study is less obviously remote – as in the case of postwar Britain.<sup>29</sup> In order to analyze this period historically, then, it is essential to register its distance – that is, its *difference* – from the present. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer refer to this challenge as the need for the historian to “play the stranger,” and they suggest that moments of controversy offer an ideal opportunity to achieve this perspective: “[H]istorical actors frequently play a role analogous to that of our pretend-stranger,” they explain, because “in the course of controversy they attempt to deconstruct the taken-for-granted quality of their antagonists’ preferred beliefs and practices.”<sup>30</sup> That is, in the course of public debate, assumptions and values that might otherwise remain hidden are exposed and articulated, making a moment of controversy a fresh point of entry into a world that initially seemed familiar.

Another problem in writing recent history arises when the historian’s interpretive categories are inherited from the very actors being studied. As Lionel Trilling cautioned, “We cannot think modernly in ancient words; we betray either the one time or the other.”<sup>31</sup> In the history of postwar Britain, such inherited (if not ancient) categories include “decline” and the “two cultures.” This state of affairs would hardly be tolerated in histories of the Reformation or slavery, and it is equally problematic (if less readily apparent) when the subject is more

*Representations* 59 (Summer 1997). Dominick LaCapra criticizes this approach as applied to cultural history in “Is Everyone a *Mentalité* Case? Transference and the ‘Culture’ Concept,” *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 71–94.

<sup>29</sup> In this way, recent history lends itself to a problem identified by Collini, “the deeply entrenched cultural prejudice that we already know the answer and know that it is not very interesting,” *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 502. On the problem of contemporary history, see Peter Catterall, “What (if Anything) is Distinctive about Contemporary History?” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32 (4) (October 1997), pp. 441–452.

<sup>30</sup> Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 7. On the analysis of controversy in science and technology studies, see Trevor Pinch, “Scientific Controversies,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. N. J. Smelser and P. B. Baltes (Oxford: Elsevier, 2001), pp. 13719–13724.

<sup>31</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955), p. 333.



immediately familiar. To explain the “two cultures” controversy by referring to a conflict between two disciplinary cultures would be akin to explaining that witches were persecuted in early modern Europe because they were witches, or that fugitive slaves were returned to their owners because they were property. Adopting these categories as our terms of explanation (“witch,” “property,” “two cultures”) merely repeats them in the present as they were used in the past, when it is the development and deployment of the categories themselves that requires historical explanation. It is the “two cultures” *controversy*, not the *two cultures*, that must be the object of study in order to apprehend this episode’s meaning and significance.

In the extensive literature about Snow, Leavis, and the “two cultures” controversy, the most insightful accounts have adopted this critical perspective upon the “two cultures” categories. Leavis’s biographer, Ian MacKillop, achieved this perspective by placing Leavis, rather than Snow, at the center of the narrative. From that point of view, the argument between them appeared less like a contest between science and literature, and more like a conflict between competing interpretations of the past. “It was wrong to depict the conflict between Snow and Leavis as one between the scientific and the literary,” MacKillop concluded. “It was a conflict over history, in which Leavis was increasingly interested in the 1960s.”<sup>32</sup> Stefan Collini’s introduction to the reprint of *The Two Cultures* similarly applies pressure upon the disciplinary categories. “It is fatally easy,” he warns, “in discussing this theme, to slip into dealing with ‘science’ and ‘literature’ as stable entities, frozen at one moment in time (usually the moment when our own views were first formed).”<sup>33</sup> Collini instead registers the shifting associations of those domains, while identifying the contemporary concerns that charged this particular episode – including, among others, Sputnik, social class, the meritocracy, university expansion, and Harold Wilson’s “white heat.” And David Hollinger, writing about another tradition entirely, discusses the deployment by American liberals of “scientific” values – such as honesty, tolerance, democracy, and secularism – in episodes of cultural politics from the 1940s to the 1960s. Snow then appears, rather unexpectedly, towards the end of this story, wielding the values associated with “science” against rivals of his own.<sup>34</sup> Despite their differences of emphasis, these accounts by MacKillop,

<sup>32</sup> Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London: Allen Lane, 1995), p. 325.

<sup>33</sup> Collini, “Introduction,” p. lxxv.

<sup>34</sup> Hollinger, “Science as a Weapon in *Kulturkämpfe* in the United States During and After World War II,” *Isis* 86 (September 1995), pp. 440–454.

10 The Two Cultures Controversy

Collini, and Hollinger each attend to the ways that the “two cultures” controversy provided an outlet for broader concerns.

A historical perspective also requires that, even as Snow’s categories are unpacked, his significance is acknowledged. This sympathy can be difficult to achieve, since Snow’s reputation today is not what it was during his lifetime. Yet the cultural historian’s reason for studying Snow is not his status today as a novelist or thinker, but his past significance as, in David Cannadine’s phrase, “a man who mattered in his day.”<sup>35</sup> Cannadine explains, “His novels no longer command a broad or appreciative audience, but for anyone interested in certain aspects of British life between the 1920s and the 1960s, they will always remain essential reading.”<sup>36</sup> That is, Snow matters to historians today because he mattered to contemporaries then, and the rise and fall of his reputation provides one way of tracking the broader social attitudes to which it had been tied. David Edgerton, in a critical analysis of *The Two Cultures* and its historiographical impact, similarly insists upon Snow’s historical significance. Of the many British writers with scientific backgrounds during the twentieth century, Edgerton notes, “Snow was and is easily the most famous and certainly the most influential as an ideologue.”<sup>37</sup> Rather than denying or debunking Snow’s stature, Edgerton instead *reads* that stature for what it reveals about British society and culture. He depicts Snow as an exemplary exponent of a technocratic critique of modern Britain. That critique lamented the supposedly marginalized status of science, technology, and expertise, even as it (paradoxically) flourished due to a widespread commitment to all three – as illustrated, in part, by the hostile reception that greeted Leavis’s rejoinder.<sup>38</sup> Edgerton then takes Leavis’s critique as seriously as Snow’s stature, reading them both so as to force reconsiderations of the debate, its context, and its legacy. Cannadine thus acknowledges Snow’s deflated reputation as a novelist, while Edgerton refutes Snow’s account

<sup>35</sup> David Cannadine, “C. P. Snow, ‘The Two Cultures,’ and the ‘Corridors of Power’ Revisited,” in *Yet More Adventures with Britannia*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 197. The other writers Edgerton cites in this context include Eric Ambler, William Cooper, Nigel Balchin, and Nevil Shute (H. G. Wells, of course, was the most important such writer of the previous generation). For further elaboration on Edgerton’s revisionist arguments regarding Snow and *The Two Cultures*, see his *Warfare State*, pp. 191–210; Edgerton, “C. P. Snow as Anti-Historian of British Science: Revisiting the Technocratic Moment, 1959–1964,” *History of Science* 43 (June 2005), pp. 187–208.

<sup>38</sup> On a similar dynamic in an earlier period, see Frank Miller Turner, “Public Science in Britain, 1880–1919,” *Isis* 71 (December 1980), pp. 589–608.