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978-0-521-89204-9 - The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain

Guy Ortolano

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The Two Cultures Controversy

Ever since the scientist-turned-novelist C. P. Snow clashed with literary critic F. R. Leavis in the early 1960s, it has been a commonplace to lament that intellectual life is divided between “two cultures,” the arts and the sciences. Yet why did a topic that had long been discussed inspire such ferocious controversy at this particular moment? This book answers that question by recasting the dispute as an *ideological* conflict between competing visions of Britain’s past, present, and future. It then connects the controversy to simultaneous arguments about the mission of the university, the methodology of social history, the meaning of national “decline,” and the fate of the former empire. By excavating the political stakes of the “two cultures” controversy, this book explains the workings of cultural politics during the 1960s more generally, while also revising the meaning of a term that continues to be evoked to this day.

GUY ORTOLANO is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Virginia.

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C. P. Snow in 1963, the year of “The Two Cultures: A Second Look.”
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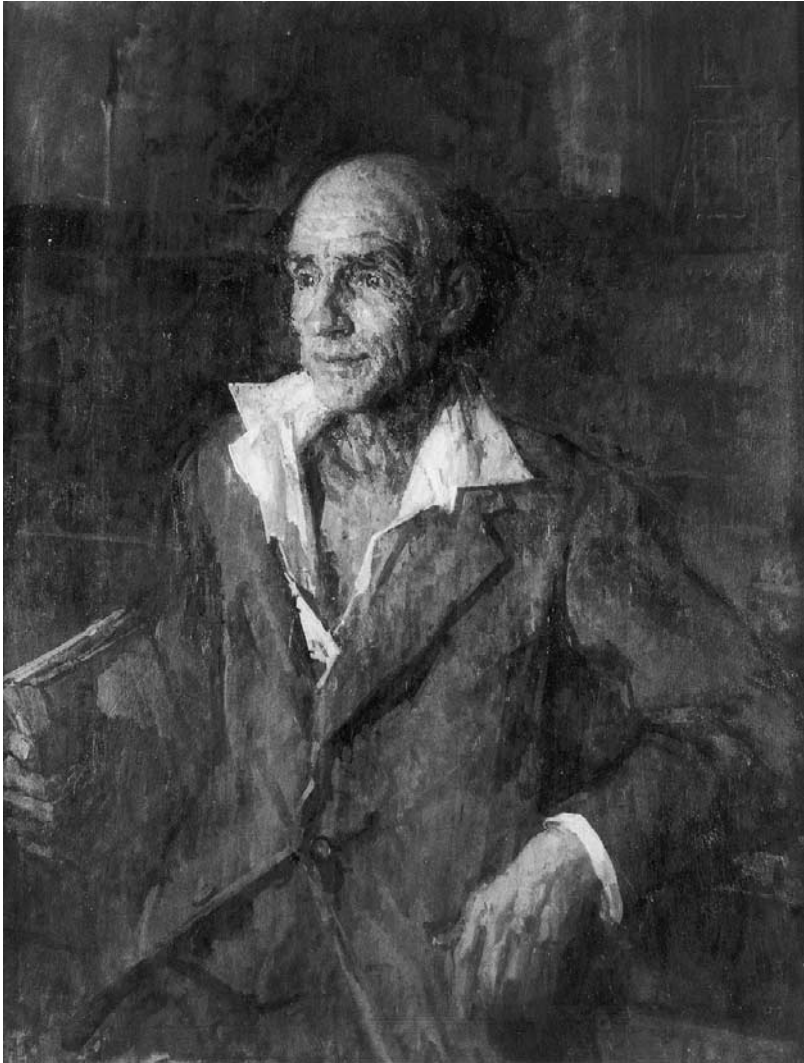
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F. R. Leavis in 1961, the beginning of his retirement year. [Portrait by Peter Greenham, reproduced by permission of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York, and with the kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Downing College, Cambridge.]

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Illustrations

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