of just causes except their own" (p. 221). Critics of Ireland's foreign and security policies through World War II and the Cold War would do well to reflect on these words.

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Guy Ortolano. *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2009. Pp. xi, 295. $99.00.

This book is in part a record of the debate between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis on the matter of the "two cultures," but it is also a lot more. In guiding us through the origins, content, and fall-out from this most famous of academic clashes, Guy Ortolano illuminates key aspects of culture and society at a critical moment in British postwar history. He uses the clash between what he terms the "technocratic liberalism" of Snow and the "radical liberalism" of Leavis to take us to the heart of a political disagreement about the trajectory of British politics and economy in the age of Harold Macmillan and Harold Wilson, arguing persuasively that a debate previously understood primarily "as a *disciplinary* dispute about the arts and the sciences was actually an *ideological* conflict between competing views of Britain's past, present and future" (p. 1). Ortolano sees his task here as that of the informed external viewer. He uses the argument between two now largely forgotten figures to "recover the context in which their arguments and reputations thrived" (p. 11), taking as his "objects of study: the 'two cultures' controversy, the postwar British context, and the historical tradition discussing the arts and the sciences" (p. 23). He does so, the better to illuminate "agendas and rivalries that simmered beneath—and occasionally boiled over—a seemingly placid post-war consensus" (p. 24).

The result is a wide-ranging and elegantly written study that brings together a series of integrated stories. The book tells the personal biographies of Snow and Leavis and documents their ongoing, increasingly bitter dispute. It anchors that dispute within a wider post-1956 debate on educational reform in Britain. It explores the minutiae of academic politics in Cambridge University: Snow at Churchill College, Leavis at Downing. It takes us in and out of the Labour Government of 1964–1970, and in and out of debates within both the New Left of the 1960s and the neo-conservatism of the 1970s. It even touches on post-colonial economic development, as well as on the perennial debate on British decline. It explores Snow's vision and contrasts it to that of Leavis; and it takes us to their shared commitment to the creation of a meritocratic Britain: a commitment shared for entirely contradictory purposes, and whose moment largely passed with the advent of Thatcherism.

As someone who lived through this period, knows Labour governments well, and was even at York University as a student when Leavis was there as a visiting professor, I can testify to the success of Ortolano's work in its wider cultural purposes. As I read further and further into this text, I could ever more readily hear and feel, even smell, a Britain now largely gone. Snow the modernizing radical, Ortolano tells us, lost his enthusiasm for radical change as the egalitarianism of the New Left threatened his meritocratic vision. It was a symptomatic change: I knew many Snow equivalents among the intellectuals who first taught me. Leavis imprinted his acerbic vision of how English literature should be studied, and English departments should lead, on a generation of British academics. I remember them well. It is inconceivable today that a petty squabble between two socially mobile elitist Cambridge academics could shape British public debate in the way that Snow and Leavis's dispute did. Ortolano has captured an important *lost* moment—even a *last* moment—in the rise and fall of a Britain dominated by a narrow educational and social ruling stratum. The world in which they debated has fortunately gone.

But its going speaks to a potential weakness in this book that erodes the overall quality of the argument. Ortolano treats the issue of British economic decline—a central concern of Snow's—as "just one possible, and by no means the best, interpretation of postwar British history" (p. 23). He follows the fashion of declining to be a declinist. That is a great pity, for in the half century since Snow's "two cultures" lecture, the British economy has indeed declined, slipping significantly down international league tables on performance and competitiveness, and currently running its largest trade deficit ever. Snow's 1959 analysis of why that decline was likely to occur was woefully inadequate, but it was at least an important wake-up call to a British establishment still preoccupied with empire and ignorant of industry. Imperial powers take their military-industrial capacity seriously—Ortolano is wise here to follow the scholarship of David Edgerton—but great powers do not survive by guns alone. The United States may just be poised to discover that. The United Kingdom was busy discovering it as Snow spoke. Leavis had nothing to say that was even vaguely helpful to that key discussion. Snow at least saw the problem, and deserves honor for the insight.

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Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook. *The Plague Files: Crisis Management in Sixteenth-Century Seville*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 2009. Pp. x, 296. $40.00.

I began composing this review while waiting to receive an H1N1 vaccination. Over 2,000 people stood in line ahead of me, and the situation had overwhelmed the public health authorities. In addition to chatter about whether the staff had enough injections for everyone (they did not), I overheard conversations about lost jobs, real estate foreclosures, and corrupt bankers. My immediate circumstances provided an appropriate contemporary context for understanding the significance of