

Ortolano, Guy. **The two cultures controversy: science, literature and cultural politics in postwar Britain.** Cambridge, 2009. 295p bibl index; ISBN 9780521892049, \$99.00. Reviewed in 2010feb CHOICE.

Fifty-one years ago, scientist and novelist C. P. Snow delivered his lecture on the "two cultures" of the arts and sciences and how they were divided in the modern world--more to the detriment of the arts than the sciences, in his view. Snow extolled the virtues of realism in literature (as highly preferable to modernism), bureaucracy, and industrialism. In 1962, then-famous literary critic F. R. Leavis provided his powerful, vicious counterblast (nevertheless largely correct) on what he saw as Snow's considerable limitations and philistinism. Both figures have to a considerable degree faded from the public consciousness. Ortolano (NYU) has brought them both splendidly back to life, richly evoking their strengths and weaknesses and the issues on which they differed, as well as their perhaps surprising similarities in their commitment to elites and scientific rigor (probably more true of Leavis than Snow). Ortolano deals with the perception of the ironies of English intellectual life, how very trivial it can be, intensified by both men being deeply involved with Cambridge University. At the same time, thoroughly and imaginatively discussed here, the debate and its ramifications raise issues important for Britain and elsewhere for the second half of the 20th century and beyond. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. All academic levels/libraries. --  
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