

Whitfield Book Prize

(from the website of the Royal Historical Society)

The Royal Historical Society annually offers the Whitfield prize (value £1,000) for a new book on British or Irish history. To be eligible for consideration the book must be on a subject within a field of British or Irish history and have been published in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland during the calendar year. It must also be its author's first solely written book and be an original and scholarly work of historical research. Books are nominated by their publishers.

The *proxime accessit* was:

Dr. Guy Ortolano (New York University) for *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Judges' citation:

The clash between the scientist C.P. Snow and the literary scholar F.R. Leavis has an iconic role in modern British cultural history. In their exchanges, as they have commonly been understood, a forward-looking, but managerial science culture confronted a more traditional but also more humane literary culture. In this imaginative and beautifully written book, Guy Ortolano revisits this controversy, demonstrating masterfully both how much richer and how much more complex and contradictory than has commonly been supposed were the debates that Snow provoked with his 1959 address on 'The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution'. What ensued, Ortolano tells us, was 'actually an ideological conflict between competing visions of Britain's past, present and future', revealing fissures within the ranks both of both scientists and of humanists. Ortolano also provides a subtle and convincing account of changes over time in the positions of both Snow and Leavis, in the context of larger mutations in British politics and culture. The technocratic left-winger Snow ended his days sympathetic to neo-conservatism; the traditionalist Leavis provided intellectual inspiration to a younger generation of British Marxist historians. Both Snow and Leavis had bases in Cambridge colleges, and the Cambridge milieu figured significantly in Snow's 'Strangers and Brothers' sequence of novels; this book also provides a compelling account of the two men's contrasting visions and projects for the university. Though it displays a fine sense of place, Ortolano's study is nonetheless far from parochial; on the contrary, it provides a thought-provoking perspective on the ways in which we imagine cultural possibilities now.