

## **Conversation, Clamour and Controversy: What We Might Learn from the Two Cultures Debates Today**

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**Abstract:** The furious ‘two cultures’ debate between C.P Snow and F.R Leavis of the 1960s is a milestone in the history of the interrelation between Science and English Literature. Much has been said already about the arguments put forward by both scholars. However, in the current moment in higher education, we should reconsider the argument anew. We are experiencing great changes to the structures of education in England at the present time, from the revision of GCSE courses to the re-structuring of the university system under the free market and privatization. This article addresses the similarities between Snow and Leavis rather than the more famous and easily identifiable differences. Accusations that GCSE science is ‘dumbed down’ and that university humanities departments will decline if they cannot prove their economic value paints a worrying tableau for educators in the sciences and English alike. I argue that regardless of the disciplinary disagreements between Snow and Leavis, the impassioned discourses on education of ‘The Two Cultures’ debates are most useful in evaluating the present moment. While fifty years ago there was little doubt about the value of intellectual pursuit on its own terms, today, questions about the role of the sciences and of the humanities in education focus on the organization of the curriculum and the distribution of funds. Attention to the intrinsic values and importance of education are neglected in the emphasis on economic changes to education systems. This article addresses the blind-spots of the current marketization of HEIs by demonstrating that the two rival arguments of the 1960s actually agree on something vitally important.

**Keywords:** ‘Two Cultures’, Higher Education, Science, Humanities, Funding, Curricula

As scholars in the humanities it is of vital importance that we engage academically with the changes happening within the institutions in which we work, educate and share ideas. The changes that are enacted in policy today have an impact on the education of the scholars of tomorrow, and this is not something that should pass us by without due critical interrogation, conversation and debate. In this paper I will investigate the relationship between science and literary studies in the 1960s and in the present moment. I will address how changes in higher education policy have affected this relationship over the last sixty years. I return to an influential debate of the 1960s, which demonstrates the historical resonance of the current

moment. I limit my selection to two moments in time so that I am able to speak specifically and with some degree of detail on each: the ‘two cultures controversy’ of the early 1960s, and its present significance in light of the publication and adoption of the *The Browne Report* in 2010.<sup>1</sup> This article does not hold the sciences and literary studies in opposition. Unlike the controversy of the 1960s, I argue that today some of the most interesting academic projects emerge from interdisciplinary collaborations whereby academics are relocated outside of their normal laboratory or library desk.

Donald E. Hall, Professor of English at West Virginia University, states that:

[C]onversations can take us places that we never imagined going. Unlike monologues multi-voiced discussions do not proceed according to one individual’s plan; they develop by way of negotiations and can turn in surprising ways through chance occurrence and spontaneous articulation.<sup>2</sup>

My interest in Hall’s assertion is the potential of conversations to disrupt the policy-maker’s distinction between Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, and the humanities. I support his suggestion that ‘multi-voiced discussions’ have more radical potential for the future of higher education.<sup>3</sup> Reading *The Browne Report* in the era of the neoliberal university, it can be difficult to imagine higher education outside of an economic and market-based mind-set. However, the relationship between science and literature in the 1960s was not marred by the same limitation of vision. In returning to previous conversations about science and the humanities, we can experience and analyse a scenario that is unbiased by fiscal considerations.

Whilst economics has long since been intertwined with education from the initiation of government-organised schooling in the late 1860s, it is nowadays that the limitations of

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<sup>1</sup>Lord Browne, 'An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance in England', 12 October 2012, pp.1-60

<[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/31999/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31999/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf)> [accessed 28 December 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Donald E. Hall, *Professions: Conversations on the Future of Literary and Cultural Studies* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Donald E. Hall, p. 1.

this relationship can be fully realised. In this article, I place the relationship between scientific and humanities scholars in historical focus, in order to understand the interactions that we observe between these departments in the contemporary university. In *The Insatiability of Human Wants*, Regenia Gagnier, Professor of English at the University of Exeter, states that:

[I]t is necessary to remind ourselves of the ways in which developments in economic thought were contested in the past because we find now that economism – the tendency to interpret all phenomena in market terms – is widespread and influential[.]<sup>4</sup>

Post-2010, in the era of *The Browne Report*, it can be difficult to imagine higher education outside the ideology of ‘economism’. However, by focussing on the historical relationship between science and literature, I attempt to recall a time when the driving force of education was not merely economic competition. I illuminate a moment in history, when controversy and conversation between scientists and humanities scholars and critics addressed issues other than economic policy. By reminding ourselves of the options of collaboration, conversation, and even controversy, we can potentially open doors for the future of higher education. This paper aims to ‘remind ourselves of the ways in which developments in economic thought were contested in the past’, in order to critically consider the system of higher education in the present.<sup>5</sup>

### **Why Now? The Present Situation of the Humanities in Higher Education since 2010**

England is presently experiencing great changes to the structures of education. Higher Education Institutions are being re-structured according to market rules and systems of privatization. The changes to higher education came into full effect with the adoption of the

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<sup>4</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Regenia Gagnier, p. 5.

*Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance*, commonly known as *The Browne Report*, on 12 October 2010. The report suggested significant changes to the funding of education, and in effect created a marketized system of universities that are driven by competition and consumer desire. In this economically-oriented climate, humanities departments have expressed concerns that they will struggle if they cannot prove their value in fiscal terms. Lye, Newfield and Vernon, among others have argued that universities are becoming subject to the global market as they are being increasingly repositioned ‘as a business whose primary purpose is to drive economic growth, and whose activities are expected to be profitable’.<sup>6</sup> The humanities have traditionally sought to provide an education that is evaluated in qualitative as opposed to quantitative terms. The broad aspiration of study in the humanities is to understand many aspects of human culture such as literature, religion, art, history and language. These aspects are often subjective, changeable and deal with values as much as facts.

Under the changes brought into effect by *The Browne Report* the government only endows money where it sees opportunity for direct profit or visible benefits to society at large. The function of the university or Higher Education Institution (HEI) is to communicate these profits in a clear and concise way. The suggestion that knowledge, and by extension higher education, is only deemed valuable when it has direct use or profit to the economy is problematic for many scholars. This current language of higher education, which describes HEIs as sites for ‘economic growth’ and ‘profit’, as ‘business’ enterprises, was not traditionally associated with HEIs. Stefan Collini, Professor of English Literature and Intellectual History at the University of Cambridge, wryly notes that, ‘responsibility for

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<sup>6</sup> Colleen Lye, Christopher Newfield and James Vernon, ‘Humanists and the Public University’, *Representation*, 116 (Fall 2011), 1 - 19. See also Sarah Amsler, ‘Beyond All Reason: Spaces of Hope in the Struggle for England’s Universities’, *Representation*, 116 (Fall 2011), 62 – 87, for a similar perspective.

higher education has now been subsumed into Lord Mandelson's Department for Business'.<sup>7</sup> Confusing as this may sound to scholars of humanities and the sciences alike, this organizational shift is but one illustration of the wider picture of marketization in higher education. Today, competition for students' tuition fees and research grants means that HEIs are forced to promote their values through comparable criteria. Financially, HEIs have little choice but to engage in the competitive market in order to avoid becoming undervalued in a changed system.

The marketization of education has led to the vast expansion of data and statistics, which attempt to categorize, evaluate and substantiate the value of specific HEIs. Value is accorded via statistics, data and tangible results that are realized in visual forms. Some researchers within the humanities have argued that this quantitative approach favours STEM subjects that produce tangible outcomes. STEM subjects are more readily able to make discoveries and contributions to knowledge, whose economic benefits are more directly calculable. A recent example validating these distinctions is the promotional video from the University of Exeter published via YouTube on 12 December 2013. The video, 'A Year in the Life of the University of Exeter', celebrates the successes of the university with a heavy bias towards the success of the sciences. Of the eight chosen projects demonstrated in the video, seven pertain to the results of STEM subjects. The eighth vignette is titled 'Buoyant Bronze Age Boat Makes History in Cornwall' (**Fig. 1**). This is perhaps the exception that proves the rule, as the project was based in the Archeology department. The projects share clear visual results: each idea can be articulated in five words or less in the video. The language of the promotion also provides insight into the domination of results-driven research. Phrases such as 'scientists

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<sup>7</sup> Stefan Collini, 'Impact on Humanities: Researchers Must Take a Stand Now or Be Judged and Rewarded as Salesmen', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 November, 2009, pp. 18-19. It is perhaps worth noting that The 'Department of Business' to which Collini refers is now (2014) termed the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, described as 'the department for economic growth', thereby uniting business and research under the same heading.



**Fig. 1** Buoyant Bronze Age Boat in 'A year in the life of the University of Exeter' (Exeter: University of Exeter, 12 December 2013) < <http://youtu.be/Sg1becGxJRc> > [accessed on 20 December 2013]

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prove', 'scientists get' and scientific 'study uncovers' demonstrate the equivalence between quantifiable, tangible results and academic success promoted by the video. This kind of emphasis on economic profit and tangibility of research as an indicator of success presents a challenge to much of the research output of the humanities. This particular focus leads to the funding of projects that are able to clearly articulate results in terms of REF 'impact' and AHRC fundable 'outputs', as well as a culture of short-termism in academic research. The emphasis on visible research incomes has also affected the perception of teaching within the university. As pressure to obtain funding grants has increased, the attention to teaching and its valuation has become misplaced. This phenomenon is observable in both the sciences and the humanities and clearly warrants further investigation and critique.

In England, policy-makers continue to make public provision for STEM subjects whilst the arts, humanities and social sciences have lost one hundred percent of their funding for accepting undergraduate students. As Lye, Newfield and Vernon warily remind us, HEIs are primarily becoming economic ventures, 'whose activities are expected to be

profitable'.<sup>8</sup> *The Browne Report* correspondingly asserts that, 'HEIs must persuade students that they should 'pay more' in order to 'get more''.<sup>9</sup> Persuasion is the skill of the salesman, and not of the educator (unless they are perhaps a rhetorician!). Lye, Newfield and Vernon describe the current changes to higher education as resulting in 'a consumerist view of education that re-signifies it as a private investment instead of a public good'.<sup>10</sup> Public investment remains only 'to support priority courses and the wider benefits they create'.<sup>11</sup> The government only provides support for STEM subjects that are able to produce what Martha Nussbaum has dismissively termed 'this or that immediately useful discovery'.<sup>12</sup> As the above video from the University of Exeter demonstrates, HEIs are increasingly required to articulate success in quantifiable and visible terms. Humanities disciplines, at least in the eyes of *The Browne Report's* recommendations, are not recognised as having many 'wider benefits'.<sup>13</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that many humanities scholars do not feel that this increase in student tuition fees, and the subsequent effect of marketization, provides a suitable model of valuation for education. The very fact that *The Browne Report* does not specifically refer to the humanities or the social sciences even once throughout the entire report does little to restore confidence in governmental interest in a liberal education.

### **A Traditional Description of the 'Two Cultures' Debate**

The term 'two cultures' was first coined by C. P. Snow in his Rede Lecture. This lecture was delivered in Cambridge in May 1959 and was subsequently published as *The Two Cultures*

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<sup>8</sup> Colleen Lye, Christopher Newfield, and James Vernon, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Browne, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Colleen Lye, Christopher Newfield and James Vernon, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Browne, p.25.

<sup>12</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (London: Princeton University Press, 2010), p.129.

<sup>13</sup> Lord Browne, p. 25.

*and the Scientific Revolution* in the same year.<sup>14</sup> In the lecture, Snow argued that there was ‘a gulf of mutual incomprehension’ and a ‘lack of understanding’ between those who studied literature and those who studied the sciences.<sup>15</sup> Snow introduced the term ‘two cultures’ to describe the incomprehension between ‘literary intellectuals’ and ‘physical scientists’ (p. 4). However, throughout subsequent critical debates and coverage in the media over the past fifty years the use of the term ‘two cultures’ has increasingly come to represent a broader distinction that is made between the study of subjects within the humanities and the sciences as opposed to literature alone. In this more general division of higher education disciplines the arts and often the social sciences are gathered together under the umbrella of humanistic culture, with scientific culture comprising of the natural sciences, technologies and engineering.<sup>16</sup>

The ‘two cultures controversy’ began with a series of lectures presented by Snow and Leavis throughout 1962-3. The 28 February 1962 acts as a convenient starting point for a summary of the public controversy that these lectures opened up. On this date, Snow’s Rede Lecture emerged as but one side of the controversy, with Leavis simultaneously delivering a crushing analysis of Snow’s *Two Cultures and The Scientific Revolution* at the annual Richmond lecture at Downing College in Cambridge. As Charlotte Sleight describes, Leavis ‘loudly and publicly scoffed at the value of science, and denounced the quality of Snow’s novels for good measure’.<sup>17</sup> The personal rather than critical approach of Leavis’s lecture shocked critics and friends alike. The most acerbic of his remarks against Snow in this lecture

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<sup>14</sup> C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution: The Rede Lecture, 1959* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).

<sup>15</sup> Charles Percy Snow, ‘The Two Cultures, Rede Lecture 1959’, in *The Two Cultures*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Canto, 2008), pp. 1 -51 (p. 5). Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to Snow’s lecture are to this edition, incorporated in the text with pagination in parentheses.

<sup>16</sup> Jerome Kagan, among others, has recently argued that the social sciences constitute an entirely distinct third culture. See Kagan, *The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Humanities in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Charlotte Sleight, *Science and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 3.

include: '[H]e doesn't know what he means, and he doesn't know he doesn't know', '[T]he intellectual nullity of [Snow's] parade of a thesis: the mind to be argued with - that is not there', and 'Snow is, of course, a - no, I can't say that; he isn't; Snow thinks of himself as a novelist'.<sup>18</sup> In his dismissal of Snow, Leavis was unrelenting, sarcastic and authoritative. G. Singh observes in *F. R. Leavis: A Literary Biography* that Leavis had not heard or read Snow's argument until January 1962. Perhaps if he had read Snow's lecture earlier, the controversy would have begun sooner, or perhaps it would not have started at all. It was his irritation at the adoption of Snow's proposals into undergraduate teaching and syllabi that provoked Leavis to enter into what was to become a furore of debate. Leavis gave his lecture at the end of a long career as an academic at Cambridge. He had lived and principally worked and studied there since his birth in 1895. The tone of the lecture at a time when one might expect a gracious retirement from academic life is the central focus of Stefan Collini's 'Introduction' to *The Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow*.<sup>19</sup>

In subsequent reprints of the Richmond lecture, Leavis did not retract his initial comments about Snow. Much attention is given in both contemporaneous and current discussions of the Snow-Leavis debate to the manner in which Leavis attacked Snow as an individual within the content of his lecture. However, in a recent edition of *The Two Cultures the Significance of C. P. Snow*, published in 2013, Collini offers an alternative argument. Collini defends the vehemence of Leavis's remarks as he argues that 'the Richmond lecture has been frequently misperceived as a personal attack on Snow'.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Collini insists that the comments were designed to 'correct the overestimation of Snow as a sage'.<sup>21</sup> In the

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<sup>18</sup> F.R. Leavis, 'Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow (1962)', in *The Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 53-77 (p. 57). Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to Leavis's lecture are to this edition, incorporated in the text with pagination in parentheses.

<sup>19</sup> Stefan Collini, 'Introduction', in *The Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-49.

<sup>20</sup> Stefan Collini, 'Introduction', in *The Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow*, p.11.

<sup>21</sup> Stefan Collini, 'Introduction', in *The Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow*, p.11.

Richmond lecture, Leavis described Snow as a ‘portent’ that has been ‘created by the cultural conditions manifested in his acceptance’ (p. 54). Therefore, Leavis’s central criticism of *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* lies not with Snow himself, but with the society that has promoted him to an almost theocratic height in the academy. From Collini’s defence of Leavis’s attack, it is evident that Snow was seen by Leavis as the central player in a far more complicated game.

### **A Note on the Controversy**

It is significant that it was not until the famous response from literary critic F.R. Leavis in 1962 that the phrase, ‘the two cultures’, became known instead as ‘the two cultures controversy’. There is an important distinction between the meaning of these two phrases and their interpretation in current debates concerning higher education. I will presently explore the ideological implications involved in an intellectual controversy of this scale. An intellectual controversy (as a phenomenon) opens up an internal academic issue or debate for the inspection of outsiders. The nature of controversy is accessible to all and it is also marked by sensationalism and spectacle. Unlike an argument, a controversy is publically known and often proliferates beyond the two individuals in disagreement.

In his thorough study, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain*, Guy Ortolano observes that, ‘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’.<sup>22</sup> I take Ortolano’s assertion of the centrality of the idea of the ‘two cultures controversy’ as an important concept in understanding the functioning of the divisive ideology between the ‘two cultures’ of science and literature. Without controversy, without conversation, Snow’s assertion is less powerful in the present moment.

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<sup>22</sup> Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 9, original emphasis.

In bringing oppositional forces into contest, sides are established and polarities are radicalized. However, before I fully adopt and absorb Ortolano's focus on '*controversy*', I must first express my objection to the thinking of history solely in terms of distinct 'episode[s]'. Academic interest and media coverage of 'the two cultures controversy' has predominantly focused on one or two episodes in the debate. These episodes might be the lectures or the publications of the lectures given by Snow and Leavis in the moment when they were first received. I want to complicate the simplicity of the idea of the controversy as an *event* in history and instead present it as a rupture of ideological forces that had long been in operation beneath the surface. I prefer to conceive of a scattered graph of numerous influences across the last one hundred and fifty years with lines that converge and fall apart under different circumstances for different reasons than of a simple bar chart of independent events. Nonetheless, these most famous 'episodes' form the backbone of the creation of the ideology of the 'two cultures *controversy*' and cannot be disregarded, prominent as they are in cultural memory. However, I do not wish to recount the episodes along a time-line of events, which has already been well-documented by previous critics. Instead, I want to discuss the nature of these events, and how the situation of these two lectures within the context of this moment in the early 1960s could have produced so violent a debate.

The formal qualities of the 'two cultures controversy' should not be ignored. The fact that these declarations of the value of education were presented to a live audience of scholars in the format of a public lecture is important. C. P. Snow first delivered his lecture in Cambridge in 1959 and F. R. Leavis gave his cutting response in the same institution three years later.<sup>23</sup> The preliminary medium of the controversy was not the newspaper columns, which certainly followed suit in the proceeding weeks and months, but in the lecture hall.

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<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that Leavis's address was exclusive, being presented to an invited audience at Downing College. The press were not present at the live event. However, it became a public controversy through newspaper reportage in the subsequent weeks.

These spoken utterances, these lectures, marked a specific moment in the history of higher education. It was a time in which the opinions of intellectuals were taken into account in the formation of the universities of the future. With such potential influence, it is little wonder that the ‘two cultures’ debate was a strongly contested argument.

These lectures were not specifically designed to create environments for immediate controversy. Instead, these two eminent scholars took the opportunity to use their lecture as a mouthpiece through which to address the academy. Snow and Leavis in the ‘two cultures controversy’ gave voices to the unsaid tensions inherent in higher education at the time. The words that were spoken during each of these ‘episodes’ were published shortly afterwards. Snow’s text was published as the book *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* in 1959, and Leavis’s lecture was printed in *Spectator* on 9 March 1962.<sup>24</sup> The circumstances of the initial debate are important in understanding the ideological implications of this moment of rupture. In the introduction to the most recent edition of Snow’s Rede Lecture Collini provides an illuminating insight into the functions of a spoken lecture. For Collini:

[A] lecture is above all an occasion, in both senses of the word --- it is a social event and it is an opportunity [...] [T]he lecture strikes a more declarative or argumentative pose, and even though the best lectures exploit a collusive relation with their audience, the form is inherently pedagogic [...]<sup>25</sup>

The direct impact and fallout of the ‘social event’ or ‘episode’ of these lectures has been detailed in great length: a collection of lengthy contributions can be found in *Cultures in Conflict; Perspectives on the Snow-Leavis Controversy* by David K. Cornelius and Edwin St Vincent.<sup>26</sup> However, it is Collini’s second sense of the debate as an ‘opportunity’, which bears especial significance for my project. Thinking about the ‘occasion’ as ‘opportunity’

<sup>24</sup> F.R. Leavis, ‘The Significance of C.P. Snow’, *The Spectator*, 9 March 1962, pp. 297-303.

<sup>25</sup> Stefan Collini, ‘Introduction’, in *The Two Cultures*, Canto Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. ix - lxxi (p. xxviii).

<sup>26</sup> David K. Cornelius and Edwin St Vincent, *Cultures in Conflict; Perspectives on the Snow-Leavis Controversy* (London: Foresman, 1964).

acknowledges the potentiality of any moment in time to produce enduring opinions. The ‘opportunity’ was always present; it was simply the ‘occasion’ that brought about its expression through the medium of a pedagogic and polemical lecture. While a lecture provides the chance to express a perspective in a defined way and provides a forum where one can guarantee that one will be heard, there are some limitations to this method of conveying information. Unlike a conversation or more informal discussion, the flow of ideas is one way, and assertions can only be responded to after the occasion has passed. The lecture is a verbal medium, and therefore is processed by an audience at relative speed, without time for contemplation. Often, when transcribed, a lecture loses its personal charm, humour or motivation. F. R. Leavis’s comments about C. P. Snow are made scandalous by the fact that they are committed to paper.

### **The Underdeveloped Benefits of the ‘Two Cultures’ Debate**

The lectures articulating the values of the humanities and sciences in Cambridge between 1959 and 1963 continue to shape the discourse surrounding higher education: Collini recently described how the concept of ‘the two cultures’ has now ‘entered the bloodstream of modern culture’.<sup>27</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement* named *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* as one of the most influential books since World War II in 1995.<sup>28</sup> Since then, the popularity of ideas surrounding the two cultures has experienced a further renaissance with countless articles, publications and newspaper columns echoing agreement or disgust at Snow’s comments concerning science and literature.

Through these original lectures C.P Snow and F.R Leavis created what is now called the ‘two cultures controversy’. This conflict brought two prominent intellectuals into conflict,

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<sup>27</sup> Stefan Collini, ‘Impact on Humanities’, pp. 18-19.

<sup>28</sup> ‘A Hundred Books which have Influenced Western Public Discourse since the Second World War’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 6 October 1995, p.39. Other titles selected for the top 100 included Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis.

and produced some of the most aggressive defences of the disciplines of science and literature respectively that have not been seen since. However, although the ‘two cultures controversy’ represents a clash between two disciplines, it is important to note that the lectures principally concerned a central disputation about the nature of the future of higher education. Much critical commentary has been aired on the observations of both scholars due to the sensational nature of the debate, and, as I have already stated, it is not my intention here to repeat what has been said about Snow and Leavis before. However, in the present moment in higher education I think we should reconsider their argument anew. I will now address the similarities between Snow and Leavis rather than their more famous and easily identifiable differences.

Regardless of the disciplinary divergences between Snow and Leavis, the impassioned expressions about education from the ‘Two Cultures’ debates are useful to educators of all levels and disciplines in the present moment. While fifty years ago there was little doubt about the value of intellectual pursuit, today questions about the role of the sciences and of the humanities in education concern the organization of the curriculum and the distribution of funds. Attention to the value and importance of education is being neglected in light of the changes being made to education systems. By demonstrating that these two rival arguments of the 1960s actually agree on something vitally important, the way that we view the contemporary importance of ‘the two cultures’ debate can be significantly altered. Instead of focusing on the negative side of the controversy, if we embrace the importance of intellectual discussion and debate in the future of higher education, perhaps we can make some progress. By returning to this historical moment where the guiding light for the discussion was ‘what’ kind or quality of education should be received rather than ‘how much’ education, the present limited appraisal of higher education on the basis of statistics and outputs alone can be challenged.

As early as 1962, Lionel Trilling observed that, despite the controversy and public disagreement between Leavis and Snow, they shared a passion for the advancement of higher education. In ‘The Leavis/Snow Controversy’, first published in *Commentary* in June 1962, Trilling notes that, ‘[I]f ever two men were committed to England, Home and Duty, they are Leavis and Snow— [...] in this they are as alike as two squares’.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the idea of ‘two cultures’ being better than no culture is directly addressed by Robert Whelan in *From Two Cultures to No Culture: C. P. Snow's 'Two Cultures' Lecture Fifty Years On*.<sup>30</sup> In a convincing introductory essay, Whelan reminds us, that in a system where quality is overshadowed by quantifiable data, from secondary schooling to higher education, the debates of Leavis and Snow take on renewed importance. They are significant, as they draw attention away from ‘impact’, ‘strategy’ and ‘consumer demands’ and refocus on the nature of education.<sup>31</sup> Whelan comments that Leavis and Snow’s debate reminds us of ‘the notion that human beings are capable of moving from barbarism to civilization by using their intellectual and moral capacities’ and argues that this capability and awareness ‘is one that can unite even those who are divided over the respective merits of scientists and literary intellectuals’.<sup>32</sup> The importance of intellectual conversation about the future of higher education is of vital importance to universities of the future. Economics undoubtedly play a role in this discussion, but perhaps new and more productive conversations can be heard if this is not the only voice in the debate.

The function of the university of the 2010s should not be based solely on its economic

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<sup>29</sup> Lionel Trilling, ‘The Leavis/Snow Controversy’, *Commentary*, June 1962, pp. 462-63, repr. in Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent: Selected Essays*, ed. by Leon Wieseltier (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 402-26 (p. 422).

<sup>30</sup> See Frank Furedi, Roger Kimball and Raymond Tallis, *From Two Cultures to No Culture: C. P. Snow's 'Two Cultures' Lecture Fifty Years On*, ed. by Robert Whelan (Wiltshire: Civitas, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Robert Whelan, ‘Introduction’, in Frank Furedi, Roger Kimball and Raymond Tallis, *From Two Cultures to No Culture: C. P. Snow's 'Two Cultures' Lecture Fifty Years On*, ed. by Robert Whelan (Wiltshire: Civitas, 2009), pp. 1-30 (p. 30).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Whelan, p. 30.

definition as a business venture for private investors. There is something more important at stake, which Whelan touches upon in his comment about 'civilization'.<sup>33</sup> The best thing about a debate, or a conversation to a greater extent, is that it concerns the progression of ideas and forms of knowledge from a variety of perspectives. I am not arguing that scientists and literary scholars should have to agree on everything, or indeed anything at all, but without discussion of 'what' we, as educators, are doing within an increasingly economic model, there is a danger that intellectual voices will cease to be heard at all.

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Whelan, p.30.

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