

A tale of two cultures

By Toss Gascoigne and Jenni Metcalfe with suggestions from Craig Cormick

Narrator	<p>It's still 7 May 1959</p> <p>The bulky figure of CP Snow, or Sir Charles Percy Snow to his friends, is in Cambridge in England. It's a misty atmospheric night. The spires of Cambridge disappear into the night sky, and the air is full of the muffled clanking and whirring of thousands of bicycles.</p> <p>Snow has long been troubled by a growing gulf between science and the people running the country, the politicians, lawyers and senior bureaucrats. These people come substantially from a humanities background.</p> <p>They are, feels Snow, richly contemptuous of their scientific colleagues.</p> <p>Snow is in Cambridge to deliver the Rede Lecture, a prestigious annual lecture given at Cambridge University. They began in 1859 and continue today.</p>
Craig (Snow)	<p>They're an arrogant lot, those people from Humanities, full of their studies of Greek and Latin, literature and history.</p> <p>A good many times I have been present at gatherings of people who, by the standards of the traditional culture, are thought highly educated and who have with considerable gusto been expressing their incredulity at the illiteracy of scientists. Once or twice I have been provoked and have asked the company how many of them could describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics.</p> <p>The response was cold: it was also negative.</p> <p>Yet I was asking something which is the scientific equivalent of: Have you read a work of Shakespeare's?¹</p>

Narrator	<p>Excuse me. Sir! Sir!!</p> <p>We've heard all this before. Boring!</p> <p>Yes, we <i>know</i> you think they're arrogant, over-confident. Even contemptuous.</p> <p>We've all heard you say scientists have the future in their bones, while the people we think of as the custodians of our culture, that lot in the humanities, wish the future did not exist.</p> <p>But what's new?</p>
Craig (Snow)	Are you talking to me?
Narrator	<p>[Looks round]</p> <p>Err - yes</p>
Craig (Snow)	<p>These people think they're better than us.</p> <p>But we scientists - we're the future.</p> <p>The world is missing out! - because of the arrogance and ignorance of these people</p> <p>But this time they've provoked me too far.....</p>
Narrator	So what do you propose, then?
Craig (Snow)	<p>Well, I think</p> <p>No, sorry, have to talk later. Lecture to deliver. Important lecture</p>

Narrator	<p>[To audience]</p> <p>Let's go back in time, to 1949.</p> <p>It was the Chinese Year of the Ox, and a good year for Love.</p>
Enter Geek Chorus	<p>[Chanting]</p> <p>Love is in the air</p> <p>Pamela Hansford Johnson Pamela Hansford Johnson Pamela Hansford Johnson</p> <p>[Geek chorus retreats to side of stage]</p>
Narrator	<p>Pamela Hansford Johnson and Charles Percy Snow. A Power couple with a Purpose.</p> <p>Determined to stamp their mark on the world.</p> <p>It must have been about power.</p> <p>Because how otherwise can we account for the attractive, sharp-witted Pamela getting together with tubby, pop-eyed, lumbering Charles?</p> <p>Successful novelist, 5 books under her belt, meets obscure Civil Service scientist?</p>
Greek chorus	<p>But first – the divorce</p> <p>The divorce</p> <p>Woe that a happy marriage comes to this...</p> <p>Woe woe woe</p>
Narrator	<p>Back to the future.</p>

	<p>Snow's Rede lecture has hit a nerve. Two Cultures is now a book. Snow is invited to give keynote speeches everywhere: across Britain, the States, Russia.</p> <p>Our power couple on the road to fame.</p> <p>It's also unleashed a furious storm, with the charge led by Cambridge critic Frank Raymond Leavis. FR Leavis, feared and respected for his caustic tongue and rude, dismissive commentary</p>
Fabien (Leavis)	<p>I didn't hold back.</p> <p>Snow is portentously ignorant, and as intellectually undistinguished as it is possible to be.</p> <p>Calls himself a novelist. As a novelist he doesn't begin to exist.</p> <p>What right has he to comment?</p>
Narrator	'Portentously", FR?
Fabien (Leavis)	<p>Pompous. Pretentious.</p> <p>A third-rate thinker who has to be exposed.</p>
Narrator	<p>The stage is set for a titanic struggle: the hero of the humanities versus the spokesman of the sciences.</p> <p>But where are the science communicators in all this? It is the 1960s – surely some early science communicators have begun to emerge?</p>
Michelle	<p>[Enters from left, skipping]</p> <p>Did someone call?</p>

	It's me, Michelle. I'm a science communication practitioner.
Padraig	[Enters from right] Hi Michelle I'm your other half. Peter, the science communication scholar.
Greek chorus	Help is at hand Help is at hand Thank goodness But what can they do?
Michelle	I think a dinner Let's get everyone in the same room, round a dining table, and see if we can get them to be friends.
Padraig	Sounds like a wizard idea, Michelle. So who should we invite? CP, of course and his wife the distinguished novelist Pamela Hansford Johnson. Then there's FR.
Michelle	And us. That should be more than enough
Narrator	So the stage is set. I know our science communication heroes Peter and Michelle say they have the best of intentions but will good intentions be enough to solve this argument? I'm sceptical, especially listening in on the Snows' reaction to as they opened the invitation....

Dominique /Pamela	<p>[Speaking from one side of stage]</p> <p>Is this Michelle woman mad?</p> <p>She's asking us to dinner with that ass Leavis?</p> <p>After he called you a third-rate scientist, a writer of no quality whatsoever, and called the Rede lecture "a document for the study of cliché"?</p>
Fabien (Leavis)	<p>[Speaking from the other side of stage]</p> <p>Is this Michelle person mad?</p> <p>Dine with Snow? And his appalling wife? After she called me and my friends "weevils" and "body lice"?</p> <p>And he referred to us as 'cretins' and 'madmen'?</p> <p>They even called my friend 'a pansy with rabies'!</p>
Greek chorus (half)	<p>[Divides into two groups. One group stands with Dominique and chants]</p> <p>Weevils and body lice Weevils and body lice A pansy with rabies A pansy with rabies</p>
Greek chorus (other half)	<p>[Other half of group stands with Craig and chants]</p> <p>Third rate Third rate Complacent and ignorant Complacent and ignorant</p>
Narrator	But somehow they all arrived on time. Perhaps it was

	<p>curiosity.</p> <p>That Thursday night Leavis, Snow and Pamela found themselves seated at the same table.</p> <p>Our hosts Michelle and Peter were alert but nervous. The future of science communication lay in their hands.</p> <p>The stage was set</p>
Michelle	<p>Hi so glad you could come</p> <p>Peter and I - well, we thought maybe we could move this argument on a bit, you know, intelligent people chatting over a good meal</p>
Fabien (Leavis)	<p>[hisses across table]</p> <p>Weevil!</p>
Craig (Snow)	<p>[hisses across table]</p> <p>Body lice! Madman!</p>
Padraig	<p>Yes, see if there was room for compromise, for working out a way forward. In the national interest, you know....</p>
Craig (Snow)	<p>[hisses viciously]</p> <p>Third rate and complacent!</p>
Michelle	<p>[In best goody-goody two-shoes voice]</p> <p>And there's nothing like a nice Swiss fondue to stimulate discussion and fill the stomach!</p> <p>The chandeliers look nice, Peter. Are they new?</p>

Greek chorus	<p>We're worried Worried This looks stormy Clouds are gathering We're worried</p>
Fabien (Leavis)	<p>I'm not retreating.</p> <p>I said what I think in the Richmond Lecture. And I stand by my opening remarks:</p> <p>"If confidence in oneself as a master-mind is genius, then there can be no doubt about Sir Charles Snow's."</p>
Padraig	<p>Steady on, FR.</p> <p>There's room to bring in the arts and cultural diversity and consider the dialogic model.</p>
Fabien (Leavis)	<p>[ignores Peter] That's what I said then and that's what I think now.</p> <p>There may not have been a division between the sciences and the humanities before, Snow, but you've guaranteed that now!</p>
Padraig	<p>Science communication takes a scholarly approach to problem-solving.</p> <p>We need an empirical analysis, upstream engagement and to review the continuing adoption of a simple contrast structure that opposes science and the public to self-contained antagonistic social entities</p> <p>After all, where's the analytical framework?</p>
Greek chorus	<p>What does he mean What could he mean?</p>

Dominique (Pamela)	<p>I think he means that we should talk to each other.</p> <p>I'm from the humanities and I'm embarrassed and ashamed to admit it, FR, after your disgraceful remarks.</p> <p>You are dealing with a genius here, and yet you won't recognise him.</p> <p>Weevil? It's a kind word for what you are...</p>
Padraig	<p>We need platforms for transdisciplinarity and to participate in bi-directional knowledge exchange</p> <p>Societal interaction enabling mutual learning</p> <p>[Sits back looking pleased with himself]</p>
Michelle	<p>I quite like weevils.</p> <p>They have a really interesting life cycle. The female rice weevil lays from 36 to 254 eggs at a sitting</p>
Dominique (Pamela)	<p>You know, you're not helping</p> <p>Charles is quite upset....</p>
Craig (Snow)	<p>I'm a first-class brain, and I'm not getting my due recognition.</p> <p>Top novelist, Minister for science in the national government, intellectual force recognised across 3 continents....</p>
Dominique (Pamela)	<p>He should be getting the Nobel Prize.</p>
Fabien (Leavis)	<p>You will go down in history as a cypher, Snow</p> <p>And the lecture I gave, where I exposed you for the pigmy you</p>

	are? It will be a classic
Narrator	Is this really fixing things? What are Peter and Michelle trying to do? Are they really trying to make things better?
Greek chorus	It's not working It's not working
Padraig	I say we set up a committee. With criteria
Dominique (Pamela)	The man's a fool. Come on Charles, we're leaving
Michelle	No don't go. Pavlova for dessert. Australia's national dish.
Fabien (Leavis)	This is ridiculous I'm leaving too.
Greek chorus	Mr Uber, send a car Uber! Uber!
Michelle and Padraig	[Speaking together, rushing after departing guests] There's pavlova! Pavlova!! Upstream engagement! Upstream engagement!
Narrator	I thought that went pretty well. Problem solved – not. We seem to have uncovered a myriad of difficulties. How to

	<p>bridge the gap between the natural sciences and the humanities.</p> <p>But also how to bridge the gap between science communication practice (the pavlova lovers), and science communication scholarship.</p> <p>Perhaps we should concentrate on cleaning up our own house first.</p>
Greek chorus	<p>Gloom and despondency</p> <p>Gloom and despondency</p>
Narrator	<p>But perhaps the solution lies within this room.</p> <p>The new era will rise of the shoulders of giants in the science communication space... Fabien Medvecky, Massimiano Bucchi, Lloyd Davis, Joan Leach, Elaine Reynoso Haines (<i>Add or delete names to suit audience and best to choose someone who is in the audience</i>)</p> <p>Ahh! I see before me the leading thinkers in our world. I'll ask them....</p> <p>You, sir/madam.</p> <p>Do you think science communication practitioners and scholars are talking productively together?</p> <p>Yes? Give me an example No? What can be done to encourage "Societal interaction enabling mutual learning"?</p> <p><i>(Selects victim)</i></p>
	<i>(Response)</i>
Narrator	<p>And what about you madam? (<i>Opens up to other audience contributions</i>)</p>

	<i>(Responses)</i>
Narrator	<p><i>[Turns, walks towards audience]</i></p> <p>And so here we stand, in a supposed post-truth world, trying to find what role there is for science communication, developing new ways to engage the public and stakeholders, trying to work with different ways of thinking and knowing.</p> <p>Once again, our playwrights are stumped, caught between two possibilities.</p> <p>The big question: Can we resolve the conflict that CP identified all those years ago – two different cultures?</p> <p>But this time it's the culture of the practitioner, and the culture of the scholar in science communication.</p> <p>How should the play end? You all get a chance to vote.</p> <p>Here are your instructions:</p> <p>If you think the divide that separate practitioners from scholars is going to continue, clench your fists up into the air like this. (<i>Demonstrates: shakes clenched fist in typical revolutionary gesture</i>).</p> <p>Or if you think we can overcome the ideological gap and allow practitioners from scholars, then open your arms like this; show the love. (<i>Demonstrates: arms wide spread, palms of hands turned upward</i>)</p> <p>OK ready – take your vote...</p> <p>Ah thanks ladies and gentlemen, I see the **** have it! Thank you for being a part of the solution to the problem that CP Snow identified back in 1959....</p>

The play was first performed on Thursday 28 April 2016, at the Fourteenth PCST Conference in Istanbul, Turkey.

It was substantially revised for the Fifteenth PCST Conference in Dunedin, New Zealand. The cast in order of appearance was:

Narrator	Jenni Metcalfe
CP Snow	Craig McCormick
FR Leavis	Fabien Medvecky
Pamela Hansford Johnson	Dominique Brossard
Science communicator A	Michelle Riedlinger
Science communicator B	Padraig Murphy
Greek chorus	
	Charlotte Autzen
	Fred Balvert
	Massimiano Bucchi
	Webke Finkler
	Toss Gascoigne
	Sara Yeo
	And 6 others