



C.P. Snow's Strangers and Brothers as Mid-Twentieth-Century History (American University Studies)

Terrance L. Lewis

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This book studies C.P. Snow's eleven-volume series of novels (*Strangers and Brothers*) as documents detailing the social and political life of mid-twentieth-century Britain, and points out the uses for the novels in the academic study of that time period. Both Snow and his central character, Lewis S. Eliot, started from unremarkable origins in terms of their mutual background in the lower reaches of the middle class, their dreams of success in their teen years, and their early professional education in a new, struggling academic institution in the mid-1920s. Neither could really be considered typical for men of their class. Eliot's working life would include being a very minor town clerk, a barrister, an advisor to a powerful industrialist, a Cambridge don, a moderately powerful civil servant, and finally, in early retirement, a writer. Eliot would befriend members of both the traditional and Jewish upper classes, scholars and brilliant scientists, powerful behind-the-scenes civil servants, second-tier British and Nazi politicians, financiers and industrialists, Communists, and writers and artists, providing a fairly broad overview of parts of the middle class and ruling elites of the periods.

Snow's sequence of novels is therefore useful to the historian of twentieth-century Britain, both in understanding the period as it recedes away from common experience and in presenting the period in the classroom. Snow was a classic twentieth-century writer who presented a more balanced account of the British «governing classes» of the middle third of the twentieth century than did the upper-class (and would-be upper-class) or working-class writers of the same period. His novels provide an insight that every student of twentieth-century Britain must have on hand.

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