

# Humphry Davy Breaking Down the Barriers between the Sciences and the Arts

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[Sir Humphry Davy](#) fascinated rapturous crowds when he delivered his lectures in chemistry to the Royal Institution in London. In the late 1700s and early 1800s and in sumptuous surroundings, Davy would demonstrate – with whizzes and bangs – the latest chemical discoveries. His audiences were not just made up of fellow scientists but also poets and genteel ladies of the fashionable West End.

His experiments with nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, and his invention of the miner's safety lamp went down in history – but perhaps his greatest legacy is what he did for science communication and breaking down the barriers between the sciences and the arts.

Davy's lectures were charismatic and explosive (sometimes literally, see the recreation of his exploding volcano demonstration [here](#)). And they were often poetic. Now, as the first edition of the [Collected Letters of Humphry Davy](#) is set to be published, it is perhaps time to take another look at one of Britain's most renowned scientists.

It has been almost six decades since CP Snow famously argued that there were "[two cultures](#)" of the arts and sciences. He thought that an unbridgeable chasm divided those who worked in these fields, that they had become so specialised they no longer had the language to talk to each other. Whether you think that this was true then or is true now, Davy – as a poet and a chemist – shows that any such chasm can be bridged.

The Royal Institution, Davy studies became an axis indispensable for the study of the literary romantic generation in the United Kingdom, celebrated worldwide, though certainly not always because of its connection to the scientific profession.

In this way, we elucidate how the possibility of these studies, together with the critical biographical account of Davy's literature, expand the theses on the stereotype of the narrative genre science, poetic production, and scientific nationalism.

Humphry Davy was a pioneer in his professional area for sedimenting this permeability between genres but also for consolidating the profession of the experimental scientist, whose objective became the controlled investigation, under an institutional direction, of the available paradigms and your progress. At least for the public sphere, therefore, Davy had a contribution unique historical context, which involves enlightenment, in the face of an enlightened and moderately prosperous, of a scientific vocation related to the visible progress of technoscience. Likewise, the glorification of this

professional function, in view of its persona public, contributed to the ideals of the modern scientist, a possible statement in the face of his original popularity and relationship with the public.