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Victorian Literature and Culture (2016), **44**, 1–18.
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doi:10.1017/S106015031500039X

MATTHEW ARNOLD'S DIET

By Kate Thomas

THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS ARTICLE is to connect Matthew Arnold, that statesman of culture, with a tin of Tate and Lyle's Golden Syrup, a by-product of industrial sugar refining that has been named Britain's "oldest brand." Bringing the lofty to the low, the sage to the sweetener, is an exercise in willful materialism. Reading Arnold's "sweetness and light" literally, as comestibles, and "culture" as a term that engages the culinary, puts Arnold into conversation with revolutionary nineteenth-century materialist theorists, in particular the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach. Although not commonly read now, Feuerbach's work was translated by George Eliot and influential on that of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: it is his materialism and his atheism that we see, modified, in their work. In his own time, he was also known for theories about diet and this article will, in part, show how these theories are inseparable from both his materialism and his atheism. True to its viscous, tacky nature, Golden Syrup arrives slowly and emerges late in my argument, but it will adhere Arnold to Feuerbach, and to an intellectual tradition that holds that what we eat, and whether and how we can eat, is as world-making as what we read. Sitting Feuerbach's self-avowed extreme materialism down at the table with Arnold's self-avowed extreme anti-materialism, I will show that they grapple with the same gods – the gods of Christianity, capitalism, and cultural immortality – and that they both conclude that we make and remake our world by digesting it.

You Are What You Read

IN A LATE ESSAY, called simply "Copyright" (1880), Matthew Arnold quotes George Sand, who is herself quoting her publisher Michel Lévy:

> "the reading of bad books has inevitably one good result. It inspires a man with the curiosity to read, it gives him the habit of reading, and the habit becomes a necessity. I intend that before ten years are over people shall ask for their book as impatiently as if it were a question of dinner when one is hungry. Food and books, we have to create a state of things when both shall alike be felt as needs; and you will confess then, you writers and artists, that we have solved your problem: *Man does not live by bread alone*." (qtd. in "Copyright" 320)

Sand, whom Arnold had met, admired, and even emulated, writes that she had come to agree with Lévy that "the abundant consumption of middling literature has stimulated the

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appetite for knowing and judging books" and she predicts that the new reader's new and more developed tastes would cause "middling literature" to lose its market entirely (320).

Arnold expresses outright admiration for this goal, and then ponders whether Lévy and Sand are right – that reading bad books might stimulate an "appetite" for good. Arnold had, after all, spent his career campaigning against those bad books. By the time he quoted Sand, above, he had spent a quarter century going "up and down, as the mockers put it, preaching" about the importance of reading only the "best" literature, devising a canon that would inculcate what he recurrently calls "taste" in its readers (331). But the "Copyright" essay reveals Arnold's being drawn into questioning the method of his life mission; he is clearly intrigued by the French publisher's idea that what one reads/eats might be less important than reading/eating with gusto, one's critical faculties animated by the abundance. And Arnold is emphatically in agreement with Sand and Lévy that the poor need more: the essay argues forcefully that cheap books are important for the advance of civilization. "*Man does not live by bread alone*," but by the loaf *and* the book.

Many might regard Matthew Arnold as too refined, too aesthetic, too anti-materialist to talk of eating – and certainly too reverential of good literature to talk about eating it. Not so. In a "To Do" list in one of his notebooks, Arnold reminds himself to finish "Empedocles on Etna," after giving himself the directive to "Chew Lucretius" (Tinker and Lowry 11, 12, 292).[1] And, as I shall argue across the course of this article, Arnold's more formal prose texts are structured by the concept of taste as it relates to ingestion and the notion that "we are what we eat/read." I will further argue that some of Arnold's most famous formulations invoke the alimentary and indeed that the reason Arnold developed catchy formulations was because he recognized the formative power of *diet*. Etymologically, there is a relation between the words "diet" and "culture": "diet" finds its roots in Old French, Latin and Greek words meaning "mode of life" and "culture," and, in its early Anglo-Norman and Middle French forms, refers to the cultivation of crops and livestock, later coming to mean "way of life."[2] It is therefore high time we asked what the author of *Culture and Anarchy* thought about eating.

Sweetness and Light

Culture and Anarchy (1869) is widely recognized as an impassioned objection to Victorian materialism, and indeed it repeatedly rails against faith in "material" advantage, progress, civilization, and comfort.[3] The perfection Arnold seeks and espouses is instead, he writes, "inward" (63). "Inward" is a word that Arnold employs almost as frequently as "material," and in the preface he is emphatic: "the culture we recommend is, above all, an inward operation" (190). What happens if we wave aside Arnold's invectives against the material and take the notion of the "inward operation" quite literally? Subjecting it to a crassly materialist – or vulgar – understanding, it begins to sound like "innards" – guts. Further, Arnold's *inward turn* is about incorporating only "the best that has been thought and known" (79); learning, through taste, to reject and expel dross. It is thus akin to the way the alimentary canal sifts refuse from nutrition, incorporates the nutritive into the body as refined substances, and forms a pre-eminent site of negotiation between gross materiality and refinement. In the course of making the case for literary and cultural taste, Arnold makes sustained use of gustatory metaphors and it is my recommendation that we not discard his metaphors' material aspect en route to abstraction. As I pursue this willfully materialist reading of

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Arnold's anti-materialism, I follow some sturdy footsteps. Raymond Williams observed that Arnold's opposition to vulgarity is itself vulgar: pride and priggishness ultimately lower the tone of Arnold's spiritual sagacities, says Williams (*Culture and Society* 116). Williams also reminds critics hostile to Arnold's aestheticism that his work as a school inspector made him more of a hands-on culture-maker and less of an ivory-tower pontificator than they like to think. When we talk about Arnold and "taste," the worldliness of the word does not fall away; the concept does not lose its affiliation with the tongue and the dinner plate.

Stickiness

TO BEGIN SIMPLY: HONEY QUIETLY oozes through *Culture and Anarchy*. The text's trademark phrase is "sweetness and light," and I use the term "trademark" purposefully; Arnold called this and his other catchy motifs "current phrases" (*Letters* 2: 189).[4] The phrase, however, is not Arnold's in origin. It is borrowed from Jonathan Swift's 1704 *The Battle of the Books*, in which Swift allies the Moderns with the poisonous regurgitations of a spider, and the Ancients with the industrious bee who "tills" its hive "thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things which are sweetness and light" (Swift 232). The bee "by an universal Range, with long Search, much Study, true Judgment, and Distinction of Things, brings home Honey and Wax" (232).[5] Thus Arnold's "sweetness and light," one of the concepts he said he wanted to "stick" in the minds of his readers (*Letters* 1: 387), start life quite materially, and stickily, as honey and wax.

An even earlier source for Swift's image uses a similar language, but adds to it the principle of digestion. Francis Bacon's 1620 *Novum Organum* XCV divides philosophers of science into "men of experiment" who merely collect like ants, and "men of dogmas" who spin themselves into cobwebs like spiders (237). These two types propose a third, as Bacon notes: "But the bee takes a middle course; it gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and of the field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own" (237). The true critic freely chooses a garden basket of good material and then, crucially, *digests* it. Digestion, in this metaphor, is criticism. To digest is to differentiate, extracting sweet nourishment and enlightenment, and disposing of waste. Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the philosopher of food, reminds us in his 1825 *The Physiology of Taste* that "*A man does not live on what he eats*, an old proverb says, *but on what he digests*" (200). Brillat-Savarin's careful distinction casts the human alimentary tract as a discriminating and differentiating machine. Ingestion is not as significant as digestion. Digestion, made up of selection and elimination, is the interpretive act.

Digesting Subjects

DIGESTION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY was regularly portrayed as playing a constitutive role in the management of civilization. Brillat-Savarin claims that "Digestion is of all the bodily operations the one which has the greatest influence on the moral state of the individual" (204). Temperament, intellect, and even literary style, he continues, can be linked to the "state of their bowels" (205). And like the kneebone to the shinbone, the state of the bowels is connected to the state of the state. This was not an unusual belief. Benjamin Disraeli, who greatly admired *Culture and Anarchy*, opined that for a statesman, the importance of good digestion outstrips other qualities: "A good deal depends upon education, something upon

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nerves and habit, but most upon digestion" (qtd. in Brillat-Savarin 207n.3). Like Savarin, Disraeli understands digestion in close relation to morality: "A good eater must be a good man; for a good eater must have a good digestion, and a good digestion depends upon a good conscience" (Disraeli 62–63; ch. 14). Benjamin Disraeli's father, Isaac D'Israeli, also had something to say about food and civility. His very popular *Curiosities of Literature* (1791–1823) includes a section called "Ancient Cookery, and Cooks" which laments the modern falling away from ancient culinary prowess, warning that losing the art of cooking might lead to social disarray. Linking the "art of Cookery" to "nothing less than the origin of society," the elder D'Israeli refers vaguely to "some philosopher" who defined man as a "cooking animal." This "philosopher" was James Boswell, who coins the phrase when claiming "no beast is a cook" (Boswell 177n.1).[6] Denise Gigante points out that "Boswell's definition of man as *homo culinarius*, the seeming offhand remark of an urban bon vivant, is offered here in conversation with Burke at a time when contending definitions of civic humanism (the condition of our existence in civil society) were jostling for cultural dominance" (Gigante 5).

D'Israeli reaches for Boswell's words in order to trace the development of civilization out of and away from savagery, an accomplishment made through culinary practices. Structuring his chapter through quotation from Athenæus's works, D'Israeli illustrates his point that cookery produces civil order with a section drawn from the *Samothracians* of Athenion:

> The art of cookery drew us gently forth
> From that ferocious life, when void of faith
> The Anthropophaginian ate his brother!
> To cookery we owe well-ordered states,
> Assembling men in dear society.
> Wild was the earth, man feasting upon man,
> When one of nobler sense and milder heart
> First sacrificed an animal; the flesh
> Was sweet; and man then ceased to feed on man! (D'Israeli 2: 251)

To cook is to tame and be tamed, to be faith-full and to learn how to assemble men (it is worth remembering here that one definition of "diet" means "assembly").[7] Like Arnold, D'Israeli negotiates between the Ancients and the Moderns, his eye on the prize of "well-ordered states" and also well-fed peasants: the loss of culinary skills disproportionately affects "the common people," he writes (2: 254). When Benjamin Disraeli sedately links a good digestive system with good statesmanship, he concurs with his father, and his father's ancient and eighteenth-century sources, that there is a constitutive relation between state and stomach. However, both D'Israeli and those sources engage a more pointed, lurid sense of peril: for them, the society that turns away from the culinary arts risks class conflict and even collapse into cannibalism.

Flesh-eating anarchy, in other words, can devolve from loss of culinary culture. This vision of social unrest is shared by Matthew Arnold, who structures *Culture and Anarchy* through scenes of ordered and disordered eating. It is commonly noted that *Culture and Anarchy* is pricked to action by the figure of the Hyde Park rioter protesting the defeat of the Reform Bill in July 1866 and its failures to widen the male franchise.[8] Often forgotten, however, is that nineteenth century enfranchisement riots had much to do with food. Indeed,

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the franchise was itself commonly *defined* via food and the cooking of food. In some English boroughs, pre-reform voting rights were legally determined by whether or not a man boiled his own cooking pot, a definition that was used to differentiate a householder from a tenant. In addition, and more simply, riots over the sheer cost of bread formed a rallying cry within suffrage agitation. Food was thereby both an index and a goal of enfranchisement.

To pursue the nature of the relation between the vote and the plate, I want to attend to the portrayal of the rioter. Upon first mention, Arnold characterizes him as having no order to his disorder, merely aimless ambition for his class to rise to rule. Arnold is impatient with such grasping ineffectiveness even as he admits that "our social machine is a little out of order; there are a good many people in our paradisiacal centres of industrialism and individualism taking the bread out of one another's mouths" (*Culture and Anarchy* 88). Arnold raises the "little" problem that the much vaunted production-consumption machine of Victorian industrialism feeds off the starvation of others, while there is no one eating from the tree of knowledge or enlightenment in these "paradisiacal centres." The starvation of some and the satisfied greed of others are symptoms, for Arnold, of an ailing socio-cultural order. These symptoms constitute a pall in the ruddy, chauvinist Anglo-Saxon cheeks of the Adderleys and Roebucks and they aid Arnold in diagnosing ruddy, chauvinist Anglo-Saxonism as itself an ailment. Thus hunger, a somatic function, becomes a "point of emergence of the truth about social relations," as Žižek – through Lacan through Marx – defines the symptom (26).

Hunger is radically socializing. The realization that we need something other than our own bodies, in order to sustain our bodies, brings us into powerful relation with an external world. As Maud Ellmann brilliantly outlines it in *The Hunger Artists*, Hegel, Feuerbach (about whom more later), Marx, and Freud all agree that "eating is the origin of subjectivity" (30). The hungry subject is, of course, also radically vulnerable, susceptible to exploitation by "The system of industry and trade . . . [which] only exists and consumes" as Marx describes it (*Collected Works* 3: 141). But he goes on to propose that although the hunger of labourers makes them prone to ingestion by industrial capitalism, if those workers digest – incorporate – their suffering intellectually, it will make them distasteful, emetic even, to the land-owning or industrial middle classes whom Marx, preceding Arnold, calls "philistines." Marx asserts, "But the existence of suffering human beings, who think, and thinking human beings, who are oppressed must inevitably become unpalatable and indigestible to the animal world of philistinism which passively and thoughtlessly consumes" (3: 141).[9] Philistines, in other words, can be made to spit up. Marx allies the digestive system with critical thought and in so doing, he configures political change happening in the alimentary canal of capitalism. If the worker ruminates on his oppression, it will cause dyspepsia and vomiting in the capitalist – another way in which revolution will literally come from within.

Arnold and Marx both understand hunger as a symptom, in other words, but any revolution that hunger might spark is exactly what Arnold wants to avoid. In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864) he uses an agrarian metaphor to denounce revolution as barren, rather than fertile, contending that the "immense stir of the French Revolution and its age" did not produce a "*crop* of works of genius" (*Culture and Anarchy* 31; emphasis mine). Five years later, in *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold is happy to deflate nationalist bombast by asking if we should be proud of a nation in which workers are starved. No sooner has Arnold identified working class starvation as a symptom of philistinism, than he warns against misleading symptoms that are expressed by the working classes: the passage swiftly proceeds to accuse the "bawling" Hyde Park rioter as himself possessed of what sounds like

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an hysterical symptom (and we should remember that Freud's descriptions of the hysterical symptom emphasize digestive disorders as "exceedingly common") (*Culture and Anarchy* 88; Freud 214). Arnold writes of the rioter: "He sees the rich, the aristocratic class, in occupation of the executive government, and so if he is stopped from making Hyde Park a bear-garden or the streets impassable, he says he is being butchered by the aristocracy" (*Culture and Anarchy* 88).

Voicing the unreasonable fear that he is being turned into meat – and presumably cannibalized – by the upper classes, the rioter's attempts to be an interpreter are clumsy, Arnold argues. Starved he may be, but eaten he is not. His mistake is that he aims to be an analyst, or hermeneut, or as Arnold follows his metaphor to its end point, a cook:

> His apparition is somewhat embarrassing, because too many cooks spoil the broth; because, while the aristocratic and middle classes have long been doing as they like with great vigour, he has been too undeveloped and submissive hitherto to join in the game; and now, when he does come, he comes in immense numbers, and is rather raw and rough. (88)

This passage opens with the rioter aiming to be a cook, but it concludes that he is nothing more than an ingredient, and an uncooked, unrefined one at that.[10] Since Arnold scoffed at the rioter's claim that he was the choice meat of the aristocracy, it seems inconsistent that Arnold then declares him "rather raw and rough," language that seems to reiterate the rioter as meat, even scrap-meat. The distinction that Arnold fastidiously picks out, however, pertains to the mode (and place) of digestion. The butchered rioter thinks he will be savaged and swallowed by the aristocrat and literally turned into shit. Arnold, however, sees the rioter as "unpalatable and indigestible," to borrow Marx's phrase (*Collected Works* 3: 141). For Arnold, the rioter needs to be cultured – transformed by culture – before he can become a palatable subject. The fomenting rioter, who can be neither eater nor eaten, who cannot find his way into the alimentary tract of civilization, will become palatable, Arnold argues, when exposed to the ferment of culture.

Remembering the etymological relation between the words "diet" and "culture," there is a connection to be made between culture-as-Arnoldian-refinement and culture-as-culinary-agent. In cooking, a culture is the bacterial substance that changes milk into yogurt or cheese, or that turns a mixture of flour and water into a leavened loaf. A culture is a portion of old dough, or old fermented milk that is preserved and maintained for its transformational properties. It expresses local or ethnic particularities, because it is made of wild yeasts and bacteria that are regionally specific, and culinary cultures, such as sourdough, have often been a means by which emigrants can make some of their old ways of life portable and translatable into a new geographic context. I would argue that *a culture* is both an agent of change and continuity: an agent that is dialectical, even.

A culinary culture is also an agent of both change and continuity because it contains its own dissolution, and is alive because it decays. The cultural renovation that Arnold spent his career pursuing is similarly comprised of making new from old. *Culture and Anarchy* petitions against mindless conformity to past ways, defining culture as the result of "turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon stock notions and habits" (190). But *Culture and Anarchy* equally petitions against mindless non-conformism and this agri/cultural metaphor – in which clear, running water revitalizes our roots, nurturing new growth – retains importance for the "establishment" (200), and the "historical" (201) as the best foundation for new "cultivation"

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(200). This is why religious Dissent – the religious version of doing as one likes – holds no appeal for Arnold: the antagonistic split of Chapel from Church, the pursuit of new forms generated by the heat of contradiction is, to Arnold, risible and grotesque. He portraits Nonconformism "swelling and spreading till it swallows all other spiritual sides up," arguing that it "intercepts and absorbs all nutriment which should have gone to them" (200). This is, in the first instance, a botanical metaphor and Arnold had a lively interest in flora and fauna and botanical study.[11] The image is also framed by distinctly Darwinian language – Arnold is describing what he calls Nonconformism's "fight for existence" (200). It is also a slightly mixed metaphor, envisioning a predator that overcomes its enemy by both swallowing and starving it. The rhetorical disorder is, I think, symptomatic. Arnold, who is so committed to wholeness and harmony, is disturbed by these versions of national unity that are produced by evolutionary-styled struggles for existence that involve cultural loss. Arnold's metaphor consequently figures culture turning savagely upon itself, consuming its own origins. It is an image of cultural cannibalism.

A Taste for Text

LEARNING, THE LEARNING OF TASTE, and – crucially – the sharing of this diet and experience, can lead us away from cannibal tendencies, towards civility and harmony. The good version of cannibalism is, of course, communion. Communion, the sacrament of the Eucharist, is an unacknowledged but compelling trope for Arnold because it brings together ritual, ingestion, and shared diet. Arnold believes that literature nourishes, and he also believes that reading good literature is the way to apprehend the divine. He does not, however, believe in making nourishment or health the only goal: Arnold repeatedly condemns the false gods of "bodily health and vigour" (*Culture and Anarchy* 65, 66). He quotes the slave-turned-sage Epictetus who frowns on those who "make . . . a great fuss about exercise, a great fuss about eating, a great fuss about drinking," but do not pay attention to the "formation of spirit and character" (66). Arnold emphasizes that any concern with bodily health must be in service of the mind and the uniting of beauty and intelligence. How does eating, then, fit into this project? One answer derives from that biblical phrase "in thy mouth sweet as honey." In the book of Revelation, the Angel of the Lord exhorts the narrator to eat the sacred book, telling him that "it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey" (Rev. 10.9). Arnold needs us to apprehend this sweetness, to learn from the feeling of honey in the mouth.

Assuming new forms is a crucial tenet of Arnoldian thought: we must not, he counsels, dryly rehearse old poetic forms or dogma. We must, rather, savour and digest sweetness in order to produce sweetness. When Arnold references bees and the products of the hive, he is referencing *digestion* as productive labour that nourishes both the eating body *and* the world around that body: bees and readers produce honey and wax, which produce sweetness and light, which in turn produce poetry that nourishes civic sweetness and light. For Arnold, it is culture – in both digestive and literary senses – that churns honey into poetry, into nourishment and back again. This is also a sacramental turn, redolent with the notion that the way to apprehend god is orally, through poetry/the mouth. As with the taking of a communion host onto the tongue, the apprehension of sweetness through the mouth is more than an allusion or metaphor for Arnold: it is a practice.

In *English Literature and Irish Politics* Arnold quotes Joseph de Maistre recalling how he came to love Racine before he could even read:

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> "I did not understand him, when my mother used to come and sit on my bed, and repeat from him, and put me to sleep with her beautiful voice to the sound of this incomparable music. I knew hundreds of lines of him before I could read; and that is why my ears, having drunk in this ambrosia betimes, have never been able to endure common stuff since." (qtd. in *English Literature* 74)

This tableau that Arnold re-stages is one in which a blend of poetry and voice – delivered maternally, like milk – becomes cultural "ambrosia." Arnold is all admiration for this diet's potential: "What a spell must such early use have had for riveting the affections; and how civilising are such affections" (74). This is Arnold's revealing his attraction to a bardic model of literature-making, in which inspiration enters through the mouth and ear.[12] The neo-classical dodecasyllabic powers of the poet and the beauty of the mother are important to the scene, but the emphasis of de Maistre's story is definitely that his appreciation for good poetry was formed before he was himself literate. His taste was formed aurally (in his ears) and orally (from his mother's mouth). It is almost as if Arnold quotes this passage to suggest that the ordinariness of being able to read might be *responsible* for producing an unfortunate tolerance for "common stuff." It was certainly a taste for "common stuff" that Arnold lamented in the classrooms of the state schools he inspected: he worried that the beginnings of universal education produced literacy, but terrible literary taste.

In Arnold's *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852–1882*, we learn in detail about the practices through which Arnold believed literary taste was best engendered in both students and student teachers. Noting repeatedly that "attempting to teach the rules of taste directly" will never work, he endorses instead the "recitation exercise" – the putting of words in the mouths of pupils and their teachers (87).[13] "Then, in all but the rudest natures," he writes, "out of the mass of treasures thus gained (and the mere process of gaining which will have afforded a useful discipline for all natures), a second and a more precious fruit will in time grow; they will be insensibly nourished by that which is stored in them, and their taste will be formed by it" (88). We should be clear that it is not simply the memorization of the poetry that is important. Mere storage after all, cannot please Arnold who deplores what he calls the "*stock* notions and habits" of the Philistine (151; emphasis mine). It is in the *recitation* of this stored poetry that taste will start to grow: "The great majority of my schools now take, I am glad to say," he reflects, "recitation as an extra subject . . . . More and more the recitation should be turned into a literature lesson" (163).[14] The emphasis that I want to rescue is on what we might call the *mouth-feel* of recited poetry.

What is this mouth-feel? Arnold also uses the idea of being "nourished" by poetry in his essay "The Study of Poetry" (*Poetry and Criticism* 316). There he writes of "the tradition of the liquid diction," which he traces through Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, down from Chaucer (317). When writing of Chaucer, he makes it clear that this liquid is honey-like: "Chaucer's divine liquidness of diction [justifies] all the rapture with which his successors speak of his 'gold dew-drops of speech'" (316). Good poetry, with good mouth-feel is, above all, not industrial and not pre-packaged. Arnold explains,

> Plenty of people will try to give the masses, as they call them, an intellectual food prepared and adapted in the way they think proper for the actual condition of the masses . . . but culture works differently . . . it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords. (*Culture and Anarchy* 79)

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True culture, Arnold argues, seeks to "use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, — nourished, and not bound by them" (79). Arnold does not want the masses to have fast-food forced down their throats. He petitions instead for nourishment derived by the honeyed "inward workings" of "sweetness and light." It is a dubiously fine distinction, of course, since inner sweetness still requires an initial *external* feeding process.

It is an argument, however, in which both culture and the citizen are defined as being part of a process, and as being capable of *becoming*. When, earlier in the text, Arnold talks of the "raw person," he described culture as indefatigably working to get the raw, resistant person to like "what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming" (64). He does not want the rioter to be butchered, nor does he want him to be fed false remedies in the form of either pre-prepared "intellectual food" or cheap (79), ineffective quack medicines: this would make him into a consumer who is consumed. It is better that he is produced by culture – like cheese, given self-keeping and self-reproductive qualities while transformed into something digestible or domestic – and that as a result he becomes himself both cultured and productive of culture.

Busy as a Bee

IF WE TAKE THIS PRINCIPLE OF BEING *cultured and productive of culture* back to honey, we find it most apposite. Honey is a peculiar – unique, even – foodstuff because it is the product of harvesting, processing, and storage by an animal. It is, therefore a substance that indexes the greatest alienation differential: if undisturbed by humans, honey is a subsistence crop, produced and consumed by the bees themselves, but when humans stimulate bees into the over-production of honey and then harvest the hive, honey becomes a thoroughly alienated product. Honey is saturated with bees' labour, both manual and intestinal. Worker bees collect nectar, return it to their hive and use their honey stomachs to ingest and regurgitate the nectar a number of times until it is partially digested. They then fan it with their wings to evaporate it enough to prevent fermentation and lay it down as a food source for cold weather. Human intervention, beekeeping, involves management of bees' labour, location, family-formation and reproduction. Effective beekeeping, for example, prevents the natural division of the bee "colony," since greater productivity derives from enforced colony cohesion. We might reasonably contend that beekeeping, in Marxist terms, looks similar to factory or plantation owning.

Although Marx repeatedly describes labour as the working of "bodily organs" that soak the commodity with the sweated essence of the worker (central, as I will later show, to the notion of blood sugar), he reifies the mental labour of imagination that characterizes, he argues, human work and he resists theorizing the labour of animals (*Capital* 284–85). He famously uses the figures of the spider and the bee to differentiate human from animal labour (284), and in his essay "Estranged Labour," he describes the alienated worker as one who "no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal" (*Economic* 111). But when Marx differentiates animal from human production, he has to concede that animals produce:

> Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-

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> sidedly, whilst man produces universally . . . . An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. (113)[15]

The problem comes, we could deduce, when man sees the world in a beehive: reproducing the "whole of nature" is the drive to excess, to unseasonable harvestings and impracticable commodity and profit making. Taking honey estranges the bee from its labour, and "tears from him his *species life*" (114), but Marx indicates that the very act of seeing the hive as a model of estrangement amplifies the injury. And indeed, the literary celebrations of honey as bounty, from which Arnold draws and to which he contributes, imagine honey to be a *naturally* alienated product, and the hive to be a *naturally* stratified society, a model of the naturalness of the division of labour. The worker bees, who are customarily represented as male, albeit castrated, are figured happily labouring for both the "queen," so-called, of the hive and the gods or aesthetes who sup on the honey. The spider, on the other hand, invariably a female figure, is imagined to weave for herself alone and weaves to avariciously, carnivorously, hoard the bounty of the web.

If we pursue the histories of both alienation and honey, however, a distinction between sacrificial male bees and greedy female spiders quickly loses any meaning. Many argue that the concept of alienation is closely allied with the Old Testament concept of idolatry, in which a created object is worshipped in place of God.[16] Honey has also had long and particular relation to idolization: "honeyed" words have signalled flattery and ingratiation since at least the seventeenth century.[17] The spider's web starts to look like not the only trap in the bee/spider representational double-act: honey, with a lure like gold, can be entrapping too. A distinction between the spider and the bee – a distinction that Marx, notably, refuses to make when he pits them both together against human labourers – is used by those who want to naturalize the division and estrangement of labour.

The ultimate alienation of labour through the production of sweetness was, of course, the slave trade and the cane sugar industry. And, indeed, *Culture and Anarchy* comes to rest on slavery, addressing it head-on in the "Conclusion." Arnold invokes the anti-slavery cause to make it a rhetorical test of his aversion to revolt.[18] Implicitly assenting that slavery is the greatest of crimes, he asks whether abolition is so "undoubtedly precious" that it might warrant riots and protest marches (*Culture and Anarchy* 181). "Still we say no," says Arnold – we should turn away from the idea that "monster-processions" and "forcible irruptions" can lead to a cure for slavery, and turn instead toward that which "culture teaches us to nourish" (181). Once again, Arnold prescribes peace and "right reason" (181) – what he elsewhere calls "sweet reasonableness" ("Epieikeia," *Passages from the Prose Writings* 207). Proposing sweetness as a cure to slavery risks a grotesque tautology: sweetness was a large part of the ill of slavery, due to the constitutive relation between slavery and the sugar trade. Moreover, it had been widely represented that slavery was itself so "monstrous" and "forcible," to use Arnold's terms, that it was a practice which contaminated sweetness with cannibalism. Timothy Morton and others have documented how the eighteenth-century topos of "blood sugar," the notion that Britain's sugar was soaked with the blood of slave labour, persisted into the nineteenth century.[19] If we consider, however, that sugar was itself the alienated and alienating substitute for the older sweetener honey, Arnold's rhetoric makes some sense: when he chooses the slave trade as a litmus test of his anti-riot principles, and prescribes sweetness as the cure, he is specifically recommending honey, not sugar. We will

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not even have to agitate against slavery if we choose honey instead of sugar, because honey is a homegrown salve, not a product of a brutal, plantation-based sweetness industry.

The reading of *Culture and Anarchy* I have been outlining proposes that this text is as much about food as it is about aesthetics. It is about art and food in the age of mechanical reproduction. I have been arguing that Arnold makes his aesthetic objections to industrial life by trying to reinvigorate the national cultural diet – and I want now to show that he was not the only one who was struggling to define the relationships between food and text and industry in the mid nineteenth century. Arnold's trope of sweetness and light was, indeed, being claimed and quite literally processed by the producers of factory-made food. One of the more curious Victorian iterations of the topos of the bee is to be found in the trademark of a staple of the British pantry – "Lyle's Golden Syrup," which was made by the sugar refining company established in 1865 by Adam Lyle (this company would later become the global corporation Tate & Lyle).[20] The logo on the golden syrup tin depicts a prostrate lion with a swarm of bees, illustrating the biblical story of Samson's killing of a lion and a swarm of bees' forming a comb of honey in the carcass. Samson later turned this into a riddle: "Out of the eater came forth meat and out of the strong came forth sweetness." The answer to Samson's riddle is what Thomas Carlyle – who uses the same quotation in *Sartor Resartus*– termed "re-genesis": the honey produced by the leonine carcass testifies to the generative power of decay, or – to return to my central term – digestion.[21]

Little is known about Abram Lyle's choice of the image for his tins, but his fervent Christian faith would have made the text familiar to him, and the fact that his syrup was a waste product of sugar refining, discarded by most sugar refiners, makes the allusion apposite: out of the "lost," new life can be found. Lyle's use of this image is, it seems to me, engaging a concept that is similar to Arnold's "sweetness and light." Arnold wants to sweeten life with poetry and culture, whereas Lyle's improver is Christian capitalism, but both are promoting their wares as antitheses to wasteful industrial practices. They also both oppose brash nationalism. The lion is a symbol of England, of nationalist and chauvinist imperialism, but Lyle's dead lion has been hollowed out and made the shelter of industrious bees. Instead of blazoning pugilistic Anglo-Saxon vitality, the beast regains nobility through being felled. The image works, in other words, "powerfully to diffuse sweetness and light" (*Culture and Anarchy* 80).

Does the tin, however, contain sweetness and light, or does it contain the kind of industrial stuff Arnold deplored as debased and debasing? Sidney Mintz and W. R. Aykroyd have pointed out that golden syrup is a refined molasses, processed to be thin and light which, along with its logo, "neatly confounds it with honey" (Mintz 232). Lyle's quotation of Samson's riddle obscures the source of the product's sweetness, specifically confusing the industry of bees with the industry of human sugar refiners.[22] The same thing happens to Arnold's phrase "sweetness and light." When Arnold, writing to his mother, triumphantly claims that his catchphrases "will stick" he is not wrong (*Letters* 1: 387). The phrase has passed into mainstream idiom and instead of signalling perfection, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that it is "now usu. in trivial (freq. ironic) use."[23] Sweetness and light, posited as cure-all to troubling social symptoms, is itself troubled in the sticky ooze of honey and the tackiness of wax, which leave residues and collect dust. Not only does the term "sweetness and light" get absorbed (as Arnold intended) by the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' "culture industry," but it is used in Arnold's own lifetime as a sign under which an industrial and slave-labour by-product gets peddled as, and substitutes for, honey.

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Feuerbach's Materialist Folly

HAVING BROUGHT SWEETNESS AND LIGHT to the level of a can of Golden Syrup, I will end where I began, with the question of materialism and the way it was theorized by Ludwig Feuerbach. When Feuerbach employed the now idiomatic formulation "Man ist was er iBt,"[24] vernacularized in English as "you are what you eat," he was roundly critiqued as a "terrible materialist." "Man ist was er iBt," echoes the contention central to Feuerbach's philosophy, that God is not a separate being from humankind but rather a projection of ourselves. God is, if you like, what man is. Feuerbach first used the phrase "Man ist was er iBt" in 1846, somewhat tangentially, in his review of a book by a nutritional chemist called Moleschott. In the review, Feuerbach explains,

> Being is the same as Eating. Being means Eating. Whatever is eats and is eaten. Eating is the subjective, active form of Being, being eaten its objective, passive form; but the two are inseparable. The empty concept of Being is fulfilled only in Eating and the meaninglessness of the question whether Being and Non-Being are identical – that is, whether Eating is identical with being Hungry – is hereby revealed. (Feuerbach, "Das Geheimnis" n. pag.)[25]

This passage pivots around the principle of digestion. Throughout his work, Feuerbach opposed the idea of personal immortality; instead he championed a notion of immortality, drawn from Spinoza, conceived of as reabsorption in nature.[26] He argued that we are produced by a nature that then reincorporates us: upon death we are, it could be said, ingested, even re-digested. Critic Melvin Cherno has characterized the above passage as an attack on Hegelian disregard for *Sinnlichkeit*, or the sensual self, and as such it falls in line with Feuerbach's earlier writing.[27] Cherno also, however, contextualizes this review's extreme materialism in terms of the disillusionment Feuerbach felt at this time with both politics and philosophy, hearing exasperation and caricature in passages such as this one that culminates with the now famous phrase: "Food becomes blood; blood becomes heart and brain, food for thoughts and feelings. Human food is the foundation of human development and feeling. If you want to improve the people, give them better food instead of declamations against sin. Man is what he eats" (Feuerbach, "Das Geheimnis" n. pag.). Many critics simply dismiss this essay – particularly its contention that potatoes dull the brain and that the best diet for revolutionaries is beans – as less than sane. More charitably, Cherno claims that hearing "Man is what he eats" as an expression of pure, or "terrible" materialism is to overlook the humour, and mistake Feuerbach's tone. It strikes me that tone is exactly the problem many have with reading Arnold. Arnold's tendencies towards the ironic and the epigrammatic, and his swings between the programmatic and the phatic, combine to leave readers floundering and critics rushing to either demonize or rescue him.

If we encounter problems in typing Feuerbach philosophically or Arnold politically, perhaps it is because we are not allowing their shared "digestive" model of the workings of culture to pertain. We are not allowing ourselves to think of "culture" materially, as a substance that digests itself to create itself anew. The logical end-point of the notions that "you are what you eat" and "you are what you read" is that what we digest re-digests us. We are re-made. This leads, I propose, to as thorough-going a decentering of the subject as any post-structural thought has been able to provide. The destabilization of the subject that is theorized as decentering under post-structuralism, is theorized as digestion by these

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nineteenth-century thinkers. Feuerbach is most helpful here: in 1866, twenty years after first using the phrase "Man ist was er iBt," Feuerbach wrote a second essay and this time he employed the troublesome phrase in his title: "The Mystery of Sacrifice, or Man is What he Eats." This essay kicks off with Feuerbach defending himself against those who have used "man is what he eats" to charge him with being a "terrible materialist" (Feuerbach, *Schriften* 41). Feuerbach does not, however, recant. Instead, he develops the concept, throwing oil onto the fire by adding that "Gott ist was er isst" (43). The article is on sacrificial offerings and builds on the observation that people sacrifice to the gods what they themselves eat. The end-point of this line of inquiry is that people eat what they themselves *are*: "As is the food, so is the being; as is the being, so is the food. Everyone eats only what is in accord with his individuality or nature, his age, his sex, his social position and profession, his worth" (43).

Feuerbach's earlier work on religion, notably *The Essence of Christianity*, a translation of which George Eliot published in 1854, had already pointed out that Christianity had replaced the sacrifice of food with the sacrifice of the soul. In "The Mystery of Sacrifice," he elaborates on that theme, as Cherno explains: "Feuerbach marshals many references to show that common usage talks about *mental* actions in gastronomic terms; we talk of esthetic and logical taste, of the soul hungering for 'spiritual' food and drink" (Cherno 405). Feuerbach inverts the "man is what he eats" formulation to observe, with support from Moleschott, that *man eats what he is*: every nutriment that man consumes is already, chemically, contained in the body.[28] He thereby points out that even though practices of sacrifice look like they have changed, from food sacrifice to soul sacrifice, in fact, man has always made sacrifice of what he is. Food sacrifice is self-sacrifice; self or soul-sacrifice is food sacrifice. Feuerbach describes the eating human as always already autophagic. The child who drinks the milk of the mother is a cannibal, and the civilized, eating human who may be considered "weaned" off actual human flesh is also nonetheless still consuming human flesh and blood when eating bread, milk, honey or even water because human flesh already contains those foodstuffs' molecules (Feuerbach, *Schriften* 63–64). Ontogenic and phylogenic maturity be damned – we still eat only what we are already made of. To eat is to eat yourself.

"Man is what he eats" might sound like Arnold's "you are what you read," but it is in this later formulation, "man eats what he is," that we can best understand the radicalism of Feuerbach, and understand how very different he is from Arnold. Feuerbach's philosophy is anti-progressive, anti-Aufhebung. Arnold's paradigm is pro-Aufhebung. In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," he writes of his desire for "progress" that will return us to the golden ages of literature and culture. He warns us that we must be discriminating, and is clear that the task of discrimination belongs to the critic: "There is so much inviting us! – what are we to take? What will nourish us in growth towards perfection?" (*Culture and Anarchy* 51). The critic steers us from "poor, starved, fragmentary, inadequate creation[s]" and towards "the promised land" (51). What seems like nostalgic pessimism bars the way to this promised land: "it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness." But Arnold salutes those who can at least desire to enter and have "saluted it from afar" (51).[29] The promised land, of course, flows with milk and honey. This milk and honey is the sign and symptom of a covenant, but if we turn back to the scriptural description of this banquet-land, we learn that its very nourishment also threatens that covenant. In Deuteronomy 31, the Lord prophesies to Moses that the people will fatten on milk and honey and then forsake him and break the covenant:

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> Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, . . . that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed. (Deut. 31.19–21)

Milk and honey alone cloy the people; their "waxing fat" causes their relation to their god to wane.[30] But two kinds of things are put in mouths in this passage: honey/milk *and* song/testimony. The people's sins are revealed to them – and they are reminded of the sweetness of the honey/milk they have lost – by the persistence of the very culture they have forsaken. God's song that the children "have not forgotten," but rather, in good Arnoldian fashion, memorized and recited, reveals the distance their parents have fallen.

Arnold's desire to forge England into a land of promise by force-feeding the populace with the literary equivalent of milk and honey might, in other words, have unintended consequences. The regurgitation/recitation of sweetness and light could also itself lead to rebellion and revolution, a digestion that re-orders, remakes and redistributes the self, rather than producing progressive betterment. The rioter may be temporarily pacified with good eating, but may well return to bite Arnold, having become a revolutionary. Rediscovering Feuerbach's "we eat what we are," we find a materialism robust enough to resist the urge or temptation to replace revolutionary impulses with drives to self-improvement. Matthew Arnold does not arrive or desire to arrive there, but despite his avowed opposition to "German critics of the Bible,"[31] and despite his avowed antipathy to the rioter, Arnold's struggles between idealism and materialism take him dangerously close to a revolutionary doctrine when he embraces the desirability of the digestive subject.

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NOTES

1. The list, headed "Comp. 1849," is in a notebook.
2. See *OED*, "diet, n. 1" and "culture, n. 7. a." Morton makes this point in *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite* 257. See also *Keywords*, in which Williams points out that the term "culture" originally applied to agriculture: "Culture in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops and animals" (87).
3. "Material progress" (36), "material advantage" (65), "material civilization" (63), "material comfort," (91).
4. In a letter of 21 February 1881, he notes "The fact is that what I have done in establishing a number of current phrases – such as Philistinism, sweetness and light, and all that – is just the sort of thing to strike [Lord Beaconsfield]" (*Letters* 2: 189).
5. Swift also sets up a culinary metaphor in a Preface to the satire when he writes, "There is a brain that will endure but one scumming; let the owner gather it with discretion, and manage his little stock with husbandry . . . . Wit without knowledge being a sort of cream, which gathers in a night to the top, and by a skilful [sic] hand may be soon whipped into froth; but once scummed away, what appears underneath will be fit for nothing but to be thrown to the hogs" (215–16).
6. I am grateful to Denise Gigante for identification of this "philosopher."

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7. See *OED* entry for "diet, n. 2" subsections 3–5.
8. See, for example, Dowling 1–2.
9. *Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Marx to Ruge Cologne, May 1843. The repetition of the word "consume" is true to the original German: the system of industry and trade "genießt"; the thinking human being is "ungenießbar" and philistinism is "genießende."
10. Arnold writes against not only the raw person, but also against claims to national greatness that are based on raw resources of any kind. He extends this same passage by ridiculing people who regard coal or iron as "the real basis of our national greatness; if our coal runs short, there is an end of the greatness of England" (*Culture and Anarchy* 64). Arnold often refers to new students as "raw." See, for example, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852–1882* 179–80.
11. Arnold had, by his own account, a fair collection of botanical books (*Letters* 2: 39). His metaphor sounds most like a passage in *The Origin of Species* "if nourishment flows to one part or organ in excess, it rarely flows, at least in excess, to another part . . . the actual withdrawal of nutriment from one part owing to the excess of growth in another and adjoining part" (111). This is from a section called "Compensation and Economy of Growth" in which Darwin quotes Goethe ("in order to spend on one side, nature is forced to economise on the other side") and says this principle is upheld by botanists especially (qtd. in Darwin 111).
12. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1797 *Kubla Khan*, for example, the speaker imagines being able to recreate the music he has heard at Xanadu. If this were possible, he says, he would terrify his listeners "For he on honey-dew hath fed, / And drunk the milk of Paradise" (252, ll. 53–54). For more on this tradition, see Ellmann 48.
13. Biographer G. W. E. Russell describes Arnold's pedagogical desires: "He wished that the youngest and poorest children should be nurtured on the wholesome and delicious food of actual literature, instead of 'skeletons' and 'abstracts'" (98).
14. For a study of the practices of recitation, see Robson.
15. For the spider as weaver and bee as architect, see *Capital* 1: 284.
16. See, for example, Fromm, ch. 5. Fromm credits his thinking to Paul Tillich in *Der Mensch im Christentum und im Marxismus*, Düsseldorf, 1953, 14.
17. See *OED* entry for "Honeyed, 2." Even Arnold himself once – before writing *Culture and Anarchy* – uses the term "honied" in the negative sense of sweet-but-empty. In his poem "Iseult of Ireland," Iseult denounces "Silken courtiers whispering honied nothings" as friends to make her false (*Poetry* line 47).
18. The references to slavery remind readers that if *Culture and Anarchy* grows out of Arnold's alarm at the prospect of rioting in Hyde Park, Arnold must also have had the Morant Bay rebellion in mind. This insurrection of impoverished former slaves in Jamaica (who feared a return to full-scale slavery) had happened in 1865, just two years before Arnold started publishing the essays that would become *Culture and Anarchy*. For an overview of Arnold's engagement and – crucially – non-engagement with the question of slavery, see Caulfield 113–15.
19. See "Blood Sugar" in Morton 171–206, and Sussman, especially 110–29. For a more general history, see Mintz.
20. Commercial production of Lyle's Golden Syrup started on 10 January 1883. In 1885 Lyle's Golden Syrup was first filled into the "lion and bees" tins. The "lion and bees" tin was registered as Lyle's trademark in 1904.
21. Carlyle uses the biblical story to remind the reader that the most lovely maiden "has descended, like thyself, from that same hair-mantled, flint-hurling Aboriginal Anthropophagus!" The quote ends "For not Mankind only, but all that Mankind does or beholds, is in continual growth, re-genesis and self-perfecting vitality" (*Sartor Resartus* 31).
22. Mintz notes "The honeylike 'treacle' or 'golden syrup,' so important in the making of the modern British diet, gradually won out over the ancient competitor, honey, which it mimicked. It even carried off some of the poetic imagery formerly associated with honey" (22).
23. *OED*, "sweetness, n. 1. b."

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24. "Ein ganz schrecklicher Materialist," "Das Geheimniss des Opfers oder Der Mensch ist, was er isst" (1862), in *Schriften zur Ethik und nachgelassene Aphorismen von Ludwig Feuerbach* (Suttgart: Frommann Verlag, 1960), 41–64.
25. *Blatter fur litterarische Unterhaltung*, no. 268, 8 Nov. 1850, reprinted in *Sämtliche Werke*, (Leipzig, 1846–1866), Grun (ed.), 2: 73–92.
26. See especially *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* (1830).
27. Feuerbach studied under Hegel, and was a prominent "Young Hegelian," but broke with Hegelian thought in1839 with the essay "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy," which he published in Arnold Ruge's *Jahrbücher*.
28. Morton cites Feuerbach's "Man ist was er iBt" but does so only from Feuerbach's first use of it. He does not realize that Feuerbach later expanded and inverted the saying, and Morton instead credits Althusser for a "theory of ideology [that] offers a decentered version of Feuerbach's and Brillat-Savarin's 'you are what you eat.' If ideology is a way of positioning a subject, then it is more strictly true that 'you eat what you are'" (266).
29. For a discussion of Arnold, his critics, the Promised Land, and the wilderness, see Arac.
30. The verb "to wax" shares etymology with the substance "wax." It is presumed that beeswax is so-called because it is "that which grows in the honeycomb" (*OED*, "wax, n. 1").
31. This is a nomination Arnold uses repeatedly in his essays on Christianity, notably "God and the Bible" and "Literature and Dogma."

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