

The Iliad and the Articles: Francis William Newman's Reply to Matthew Arnold

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Several witnesses at the recent Cork assizes were inadvertently sworn on Homer's *Iliad* instead of the Gospels. The judges accepted the oaths as valid. ("Miscellaneous," *The Derby Mercury*, 11 February 1863, p. 6)

*I*n the 1860s, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* managed to maintain their culturally canonized status in Britain even as religiously canonized Christian texts such as the Pentateuch and the four gospels were increasingly coming under critical attack. As William Lucas Collins wrote in an 1862 *Blackwood's* review of translations of the *Odyssey*, "To most observers the wonder probably is, that in this utilitarian age, when men live fast and work hard, the old belief in the infallibility of the classics should be almost the only one which has remained unshaken" (345).

This unshaken faith in the infallibility of the classics is perhaps best demonstrated in Matthew Arnold's debate with Francis William Newman over the translation of the *Iliad*. In Arnold's *On Translating Homer* lectures in 1860 and 1861, the Oxford Professor of Poetry, with his high view of Homer's work, claimed that translations of Homer should be rapid, plain, direct, and noble, and that the best meter in which to accomplish such a translation was the hexameter. Arnold detailed how past translations of the *Iliad* had failed by neglecting his precepts, and he spent much of his second lecture pointedly attacking Francis William Newman's *The Iliad of*

Homer Faithfully Translated into Unrhymed English Metre (1856) for its perceived lack of “nobility.”¹ Francis Newman, younger brother of the Cardinal and a scholar of wide-ranging interests and considerable acumen, responded in June with *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice: A Reply to Matthew Arnold*. In this pamphlet, Newman explained the scholarly reasons for his translation choices and faulted Arnold for his dogmatic critical authority, an authority that had no basis in scholarship but rather in Arnold’s elevated respect for Homer and in unanswerable questions of taste. Newman disagreed that Homer’s poetry was uniformly noble but instead maintained that the poetry’s style rose and fell with its subject. Failing to take Newman’s hint that Arnold should avoid dogmatic critical authority, Arnold answered Newman with his authoritatively titled *Last Words*, given as an Oxford lecture in November of 1861 and published in March of 1862.

Until now, literary critics have uniformly given Arnold the victory in this Homeric battle. Almost all twentieth-century critics (all of them Arnold scholars) find fault with Newman’s *Reply*.² R.H. Super calls it “verbose, badly ordered, and without the slightest perception of the real point at issue; even where [Newman] is right he is irrelevant” (CPW 1.249). But these twentieth-century critics think that the real point at issue in these debates was how to translate Homer. A closer analysis of the debate, however, shows that the dispute was actually about the relationship between Homeric criticism and religious dogma. Arnold and Newman’s argument over the *Iliad* was a theological battle, fought between the Oxford Professor of Poetry and the former fellow of Balliol who left Oxford in 1830, deciding he could no longer in good conscience subscribe to the Thirty-nine Anglican Articles. By reexamining the Homeric debate in its original context, literary scholars will gain a better understanding of the complexities of Anglicanism in the 1860s and the way in which religiously-granted authority, even when separate from questions of Christian doctrine or practice, has had a lasting impact on literary memory.

The Homeric question was tied to nineteenth-century British Christianity in ways that are easy to forget today. Since the late eighteenth centu-

ry, the concerns and methods of Homeric scholarship and biblical criticism were becoming more and more difficult to differentiate. As German methods of criticism were increasingly adopted, ancient texts such as the Bible and the *Iliad* lost their generic integrity: the same critical methods were applied to both. Suzy Anger shows in *Victorian Interpretation* that much of the difficulty faced by Victorian literary interpreters stemmed from the fact that, "with the spread of theories of biblical exegesis that regarded the Bible as a historical document, scriptural interpretation moved out from the church to become more humanistic, and the boundaries between biblical and other texts began to dissolve" (3). In *The Greek Heritage in Modern Britain*, Frank Turner notes that when, in 1795, Friedrich Wolf, who called Homer "the Bible of the Greeks," advocated in the *Prolegomena ad Homerum* the theory that the *Iliad* had many authors, many orthodox Christians reacted quite negatively (Turner 146). Wolf's methods were akin to "contemporary German criticism of the Scriptures.... Because of this common national and methodological origin, the criticism of Homer and the criticism of the Bible became intermeshed. The enemies of the Bible were the skeptics of Homer, and the doubters of Homeric unity were the enemies of the Bible" (142). In some cases orthodox Victorian commentators did not bother to distinguish the *Iliad* from the Bible; instead they upheld both texts and attacked critical historical approaches to either text.³ "The day's most dangerous intellectual trend," William McKelvy writes in *The English Cult of Literature*, "was a new kind of blasphemy that expressed itself as doubts about Rome's early history and the authorship of the Homeric poems" (135).⁴ Thus, in the nineteenth century, the *Iliad* and the Bible were more closely linked than they had ever been in the past, and that connection existed both among theological conservatives and among theological liberals.

The Thirty-nine Articles provided one means of dealing with the interpretative problems provided by the poem. F.D. Maurice, who was by no means a theological conservative, claimed a privileged place for the Articles in literary criticism in his *Subscription No Bondage* (1835), published five years after Newman had refused to re-subscribe to the Articles. In

Maurice's pamphlet, he claimed that the Articles were not terms of communion but rather conditions of thought. All universities have these, Maurice stated, and Oxford was more honest than the others by stating from the outset what its conditions of thought were. Although critics might object to conditions of thought that were on the surface solely theological, Maurice wrote, in actuality the Articles shed light on every academic subject, including poetry. When reading the *Iliad*, Maurice maintained, the student will find Homer to be "a man who describes all that I see with the greatest clearness, and brings it before me with a new light and power ... a thoroughly honest straightforward writer in every respect" (28). But the student will also find Homer's thoughts "mixed up with much evident contradiction and absurdity, but they must have a meaning; what is that meaning?" (29). For interpretation of Homer, as for interpretation of the Bible, Maurice found the Articles to be a useful tool: "in a word, nearly every subject which enters into Theology, nearly every subject which enters into our Thirty-nine Articles, is inevitably suggested to every enquiring and meditative mind by the perusal of the *Iliad*" (29). For Maurice, the Articles became key not only to biblical interpretation but also to literary interpretation.

Newman, who demonstrates in his writings that he had read this pamphlet by Maurice, believed that the Articles, and indeed that Christianity itself, tied religion to literary criticism rather than to morality and truth, and Newman's belief in the danger of the connection between religion and infallible sacred texts motivated most of his theological writing.⁵ In both *The Soul* (1849) and *Phases of Faith* (1850), Newman wrestled with the significance of new critical methods for a text-based religion.

Because Newman still wanted religion to be accessible to everyone, not simply to the critics who had the ability to come to conclusions about the text after applying German critical methods, he wrote *The Soul* to help readers beset "by the desolating negations which are abroad" (Preface xiii). Of Newman's works, *The Soul* is the most conciliatory and the least devoted to pointing out flaws in the biblical text. *The Soul* demonstrates Newman's attempt to live a religion that does not depend on liter-

ary or historical criticism of ancient texts recording supernatural events. Although in *The Soul* Newman rejects the Bible, he maintains the virtues of theism and the love of God, extolling mercy, turning his readers away from a fear of God and instead encouraging them to come into God's presence expecting to be accepted rather than fixating on the sense of sin or worrying about holding the correct creed.

The Soul, although it had its share of detractors, was welcomed by many influential Victorian writers. George Eliot called Newman "our blessed St. Francis" after reading it. Thackeray admired it, and Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell discussed the book at their first meeting (qtd in Knoepfmacher 11, Hempton 64). Arthur Hugh Clough praised *The Soul* in an unpublished review:

The appearance of this book is a novelty, and may be thought an epoch, we do not say in literature, but in a more weighty matter, religious writing. For the first time since we know not what remote period, mercy and truth are met together in the world of publication, religion and knowledge have kissed each other. (293)

Newman's next publication, *Phases of Faith* (1850), was more controversial, and its content, which irritated Matthew Arnold, set the terms of Arnold and Newman's later argument regarding Homer. Unlike *The Soul*, which attempted to form a system of religious belief based on the psychological yearnings of the soul for a loving God (rather than on any text or creed), *Phases of Faith* was primarily concerned with walking the reader through Newman's rejections of the various dogmas of Christianity, focusing, again, on the problems that Newman believed were created when religious correctness was tied to the ability to interpret texts. Newman believed that the Christian religion, as it stood, demanded that each person look at the text of the Bible and decide from it whether or not Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. In Newman's mind, this was an unfair charge – to risk being sent to hell because one couldn't interpret a text (*Phases* 135). He rejected the idea that interpretative ability could be necessary to any person's salvation: "if I have been seven years labouring in vain to solve this

vast literary problem, it is an extreme absurdity to imagine that the solving of it is imposed by God on the whole human race" (132). After Matthew Arnold read *Phases of Faith*, he wrote to Clough that Francis Newman "seems to have written himself down an ass.... One would think to read him that enquiries into articles, biblical inspiration, etc., etc., were as much the natural functions of a man as to eat and copulate" (*Letters* 115).

Although *Phases of Faith* was by no means universally beloved, Arnold's reaction was certainly not the most common one. Few critics, like Arnold, simply refused to see the value in Newman's questions. *Phases of Faith* aroused unease and hostility among Evangelicals, inspiring several book-length rebuttals.⁶ Particularly after Newman's 1853 revision, in which he added a chapter entitled, "The Moral Perfection of Jesus," Newman made many enemies. He claimed that, once the supernatural authority of Christ was discounted (and Newman felt compelled to discount it), Christ appeared to be a very arrogant and not a particularly moral man. Newman believed that if Christ's morality were freely questioned, inquirers would find that Christ "after assuming to be an oracular teacher, [taught] some fanatical precepts, and [advanced] dogmatically weak and foolish arguments" (150).

Arnold's dismissive approach to Newman extended into his lectures on Homer, and Newman's opinion of oracular teachers affected Newman's reply. Arnold's biographer, Lionel Trilling, although he goes on to mock Newman's eccentricities, does recognize that *On Translating Homer* is about Arnold's response to *Phases of Faith* as much as it is about Arnold's response to Newman's translation: "The condemnation of Francis Newman bulks large in the lectures not only because Newman replied to the second lecture ... but because Newman is really the game he is stalking throughout the series" (168). Trilling claims Arnold "might well have suspected that the translation failed of nobility because Newman himself failed of nobility," a failure that "goes beyond mere personal inadequacy and represents a national characteristic" (168).⁷

Particularly because in *Phases of Faith* Newman had identified himself with the many who were unable to solve the "vast literary problem"

the Bible presents, Arnold's censure of Newman's critical ability stung. Newman wished to show that controversial theological questions were merely literary questions that had nothing to do with a person's religiosity or morality. In *On Translating Homer*, Arnold identifies Newman as the problem, rather than, like Newman, seeing the problem in the difficulty of the literary criticism. But for both Arnold and Newman it becomes apparent that Christianity was intricately tied to literature. Indeed, after his publication of *The Soul*, Newman would never escape the connection. After *The Soul*, almost all of Newman's other works on religion focus on questions of literary and historical criticism. Intent on proving that a text-dependent religion led the historical and literary critic nowhere, Newman's approach only demonstrated the impossibility of separating religion from literary and historical criticism.

All of Newman's main points in *Phases of Faith* re-emerge in Newman's writing about the *Iliad* – and in Newman's response to Arnold. Newman's dissatisfaction with the Bible, as recorded in *Phases of Faith*, can be summarized in three main points: the text required Newman to believe in supernatural miracles that he would disbelieve in any other text, the theology upheld in the Bible and the actions portrayed there did not consistently conform to Newman's ideas of right and wrong, and the oracular and authoritative statements made by Christ struck Newman as distasteful. When Newman read the *Iliad*, it was important for him to differentiate the poem from the Bible not, like orthodox readers, because he wanted to maintain Scripture's sacredness but rather because he held such a poor opinion of the Bible. He wished to separate the two because he wanted to show that the *Iliad* was removed from supernatural authority, which Newman saw as a threat to true religious feeling.⁸

Given Newman's strong feelings against the supernatural in literature, his decision to "[devote] every possible quarter of an hour for two years and a half to translate the *Iliad*" seems somewhat out of character (*Reply* 64).⁹ But Newman was able to grant cultural authority to the poem because he thought that by the nineteenth century the poem's religious authority had been removed. No nineteenth-century reader would convert to the an-

cient Greek religion after reading the *Iliad*.¹⁰ Newman's debate with Matthew Arnold upset him so greatly because Arnold made it clear that, even if no one believed in the supernatural events in the *Iliad*, religious authority would still influence readings of the poem.

It is possible that Newman did not realize to what extent his admiration for the poem flowed from the same source as his admiration for the Bible. He read both books in boyhood, and both books were canonized in the British educational system. Although Newman disapproved of the "fanciful invention, wholly unmoral, and into company with which nothing can force the conscience" that created the gods of Greece, he admired the *Iliad*'s human drama:

a sense of the Sublime and Beautiful, though it be not yet Religion, supplies to Morals an important part of that, which it is reserved for Religion to give in full power and divine harmony.... to weep with Andromache, to shudder for Hector, to tremble at Achilles, to admire Alcestis, to rejoice with Admetus, constitute a better moral training than Paley's Philosophy or Aristotle's Ethics can give.
(*The Soul* 15, 21)

Phases of Faith makes it clear that Newman's appreciation of and his disappointment in the Bible's Christ stemmed from his desire for the sublime. Newman describes his discovery that "my Christ was not the figure accurately painted in the narrative, but one kindled in my imagination by the allusions and (as it were) poetry of the New Testament" (62-63).

Newman's decision to devote many works to attacking the authority of the Bible even as he translated the *Iliad* apparently resulted from his belief that he admired the *Iliad* on its own terms rather than in the light of any authority. Although the *Iliad*'s elevated position in English universities gave it a cultural authority perhaps not solely based on its own merit, no one's Oxford fellowship depended on his ability to read Homer in the light of any official doctrine. However, Arnold's lectures *On Translating Homer* seemed determined to invent doctrines regarding the *Iliad*.

In Arnold's first lecture, he notes that although he has never translated Homer himself, he has several suggestions for future translators. Claiming that the *Iliad* is rapid, plain, direct, and noble, Arnold lists how various translators have failed to realize these four of his expectations. Newman "has yet failed more conspicuously than any of them" by his lack of "nobleness" (103). Newman, in his preface to the *Iliad*, had written that the first duty of the translator is to be "faithful." Arnold agrees and notes that "the question at issue ... is, in what faithfulness consists" (98). For Newman, faithfulness meant giving the most accurate translation of the Greek idioms, choosing a suitable rhythm but avoiding rhyme, and using archaic words when possible, so as to give the effect that Newman believed the poem would have given to its hearers in Athens. The duty of being "faithful" was "a historical one.... I do not say [the translator] is bound to reproduce every petty defect.... But he has a general duty of telling truth concerning the original ... and this duty hinders his aiming at other or more excellence than he actually finds in the original" (Preface xvi). Unlike Arnold, who finds Homer "noble" throughout, Newman believes that Homer's style "rises and falls with his subject.... I added no proof; for I did not dream that proof was needed" (*Reply* 31).

The terms of the debate between Newman and Arnold are amusingly ironic. Almost as if Arnold has determined to provoke Newman, Arnold claims for the critic every position that Newman had fought against in his creed-opposing *Phases of Faith*. Arnold sets up doctrines about the text of the *Iliad*, sometimes criticizing translators for failing to live up to the axioms that Arnold himself had invented, axioms the translators had never heard of.¹¹ Arnold sets the text on a pedestal, claiming that only authorities have the right to critique it (and that Newman is not an authority). And, in *Last Words*, Arnold deifies the literary critic's role, making literary pronouncements that mimic the oracular pronouncements of Christ that Newman finds so objectionable in *Phases of Faith*.¹²

Newman recognizes that Arnold is approaching literature dogmatically, and he responds by taking issue with Arnold's position of authority. He complains that Arnold criticizes his word choice without giving a word-

for-word English translation from the Greek, leaving the non-Greek-speaking public to assume that Newman's Greek is bad. He scolds Arnold for his ignorance of facts: "Mr. Arnold assumes tones of great superiority; but every school-boy knows that diffuseness is a distinguishing characteristic of Homer" (*Reply* 76). And again, "Mr. Arnold cannot write a sentence on Greek, without showing an ignorance hard to excuse in one who thus comes forward as a vituperating censor" (77). Newman particularly resents Arnold's speaking from a position of privilege.

Though neither Arnold nor Newman directly refer to the Thirty-nine Articles, the Articles loom large in this debate. Both Arnold and Newman disliked the Articles, but only Newman refused subscription. Although Newman, at seventeen, had originally found subscription "'no bondage' but pleasure; for I well knew and loved the Articles," Arnold objected to the Articles even as he first subscribed to them as an undergraduate (*Phases* 2).¹³ In a December 1862 letter to his mother, Mary Penrose Arnold, Arnold wrote that "to profess to see Christianity through the spectacles of a number of second and third rate men who lived in Queen Elizabeth's time (and this is what office holders under the 39 articles do) ... is an intolerable absurdity" (2.172). Despite his dissent, not only was Arnold willing to subscribe to the Articles as a practical move, he held a poor opinion of those who refused to subscribe, and of those who explained their dissent to the public.¹⁴

Arnold, by having agreed to the theological authority of the Articles, was given a position of critical authority that would never be granted to Newman. Consider Arnold's position on the question of who has the right to judge a literary text:

Let not the translator, then, trust to his notions of what the ancient Greeks would have thought of him; he will lose himself in the vague. Let him not trust to what the ordinary English reader thinks of him; he will be taking the blind for his guide. Let him not trust to his own judgment of his own work; he may be misled by individual caprices. Let him ask how his work affects those who both know Greek and can appreciate poetry; whether to read it gives

the Provost of Eton, or Professor Thompson at Cambridge, or Professor Jowett here in Oxford, at all the same feeling which to read the original gives them. (*On Translating Homer* 99)

Newman correctly points out that in giving these three men as authorities, Arnold has just formed an élite club that Newman cannot join because of his theological views: "[Arnold] suddenly enters a plea ... as a pretence for carrying the cause into a new court, that of the Provost of Eton and two Professors, into which court I have no admission" (*Reply* 34-35). If this is the court in which he will be judged, Newman's inability to sign the Thirty-nine Articles has excluded him from being a valid literary critic. Arnold may have believed that even these men, if translators, could have been misled by their individual caprices, but Newman knew that his qualifications were as good as theirs. Newman taught Classics at Manchester New College and Latin at University College in London. Newman also knew that he had shared his translation with "'the scholars' tribunal' ... to the extent of my opportunity" (1-2). "I feel it rather odd," Newman writes, "that Mr. Arnold begins by complimenting me with 'genuine learning,' and proceeds to appeal from me to the 'living scholar.' (What if I were bluntly to reply: 'Well! I am the living scholar?')" (34). Arnold's jibe left two possibilities as to why Newman was not the living scholar Arnold required. Either it was because he was not a part of the Article-signing Oxford faculty or because he could not, in Arnold's terms, "appreciate poetry." Arnold's later *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) would make it apparent that Arnold believed both reasons one and the same: the Nonconformist, by virtue of his nonconformity, is out of the main current of national life and therefore less likely to appreciate literature. Arnold writes,

the Nonconformist is not in contact with the main current of national life, like the member of an Establishment.... just what is not essential in religion he comes to mistake for essential, and a thousand times the more readily because he has chosen it for himself.... All this leaves him little leisure or inclination for culture. (10-11)¹⁵

Arnold's allusion to Benjamin Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek and a fellow of Balliol, as "the living scholar" would have brought a particular sting. Newman had been a fellow in that very college. Arnold grants Jowett expertise in Greek, but Arnold's criteria for expert status, though unconscious, appears to be no more than the signature of Articles that neither Jowett nor Newman believe.¹⁶ Jowett was well known for his theological differences from the Articles – and for his signature of them.¹⁷ As Oxford and Cambridge were the center of classical learning in England, Greek scholars had incentives to belong to the Church of England.¹⁸ Until the Universities Test Act was passed in 1871, the livelihoods of both clergymen and professors depended on their ability to read the Bible in conformity with the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles. But it was becoming increasingly apparent that clerics, dons, and fellows did not read sacred text in conformity with the Articles.¹⁹

Although Newman personally disagreed with Jowett's decision to subscribe to the Articles, he had defended Jowett in the *Westminster Review* in 1859.²⁰ Newman claimed that those who "are eager to hunt down with invective a man of Professor Jowett's stamp" should examine their own views since neither the Evangelical, High Church, nor Broad Church adherents could be members of such a party while still believing all of the Articles. "Hence the clergy collectively are involved in a position, to one and all equally indefensible" (37).

The Thirty-nine Articles were thus very imperfectly regulating approved approaches to biblical and literary interpretation. In the 1860s, when Arnold and Newman's debate took place, the conflict over the Anglican Articles was coming to a head, and Jowett and Newman were at the center of the controversy. Just a few months before Arnold's lecture, in March of 1860, Jowett had published his essay, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews*. In *Essays and Reviews*, Article-signing professors and clerics published articles in favor of critical historical approaches to Scripture, approaches that had previously been advocated only by those who, like Newman, were outside the Anglican fold. Jowett's essay, while not among the most controversial, clearly demonstrated that his

views were not in alignment with the Articles he had signed. Meanwhile, in the popular press, the Essayists' beliefs were equated with Newman's; their views were shocking only because they published them while remaining clergymen.

Newman's name came up several times in press reports of the *Essays and Reviews* heresy trials.²¹ *The Morning Chronicle* of 10 January 1862 reported that Dr. Phillimore, who was arguing for the prosecution of Rowland Williams, stated, "Whatever were the intentions of the writers of the book, the conclusions drawn from the arguments put forward by the *Westminster Review* and by Mr. Francis Newman, a professed deist, were such as were calculated to place the establishment in jeopardy" (6).²² Nor was the Homeric question forgotten in the uproar over *Essays and Reviews*. Introducing his argument, Dr. Phillimore maintained that "a clergyman within the Church could not treat the Bible in the same manner as he could criticize *Homer* or *Herodotus*" (*Times*, 11 January 9).

The broader context of the Homeric debate alone demonstrates the theological nature of the question of *Iliad* translation, but even if that context were ignored, Arnold's language within *On Translating Homer* quickly links translation theory and religious authority. When Newman responds to Arnold's charges in *On Translating Homer*, he notices that they are in a theological debate, considering Arnold's opinions to be based on various doctrines of his own rather than the text as it stood: "I shall fully reply to the numerous dogmatisms by which he settles the case against me," Newman writes (2). Newman maintains that his decision to respond to Arnold at all is the result of Arnold's position of authority: "I am wondering that I should have to write against such notions: I would not take the trouble, only that they come against me from an Oxford Professor of Poetry" (62). Newman finds Arnold's beliefs to be unfounded on any sort of textual criticism. "What is easier than for one to call another ignoble? what more damaging? what harder to refute? ... But, I think, he was not very discreet, but very unwise, in making dogmatic statements on the ground of erudition" (75).

Newman and Arnold both praise the *Iliad* highly, associating it with the best in literary and religious texts. In his preface, Newman writes that

“[The influence of Homer’s poems] over the Greek mind may be compared to the combined effect produced in England by the Bible and by Shakespeare” (iii). But Newman’s beliefs do not stop him from taking a very free hand with the text.²³ Arnold is less willing to remove the text from its place of honor. Arnold not only faults Newman for his eccentricity and lack of nobleness in translating Homer, he proceeds to tell Newman that Homer should be noble because the Bible is noble. He suggests that the translator take his cue from the very book Newman has been attempting to demystify: “He will find one English book and one only, where, as in the *Iliad* itself, perfect plainness of speech is allied with perfect nobleness; and that book is the Bible” (*On Translating Homer* 155-56).

In a paragraph that would seem designed to irritate Newman, Arnold criticizes Newman’s diction by referring him to the Bible:

Finally, let me further illustrate from the twentieth line the value which I attach, in a question of diction, to the authority of the Bible. The word “pre-eminent” occurs in that line; I was a little in doubt whether that was not too bookish an expression to be used in rendering Homer, as I can imagine Mr. Newman to have been a little in doubt whether his “responsively accosted” ... was not too bookish an expression. Let us both, I say, consult our Bibles: Mr. Newman will nowhere find it in his Bible that David, for instance, “*responsively accosted* Goliath;” but I do find in mine that “the right hand of the Lord hath the *pre-eminence*,” and forthwith I use “pre-eminent,” without scruple. My Bibliolatry is perhaps excessive; and no doubt a true poetic feeling is the Homeric translator’s best guide in the use of words; but where this feeling does not exist, or is at fault, I think he cannot do better than take for a mechanical guide Cruden’s *Concordance*. (*On Translating Homer* 165-66)²⁴

Arnold’s reference to bibliolatry is probably a joke at Newman’s expense. In *The Soul and Phases of Faith*, Newman is particularly harsh to bib-

liolatry, that bowing to the authority of a literal text rather than to God or to one's own sense of ethics. In 1860, with *Phases of Faith* just republished in a new edition, Oxford undergraduates would still be able to get the joke. They could laugh without having to take either Newman's theological concerns or his translation seriously. Newman finds Arnold's condemnation of his words arbitrary, dictated by Arnold's "doctrine" and his "monomaniac fancy that there is nothing quaint and nothing antique in Homer" (*Reply* 89).

When Newman points out what he perceives as Arnold's factual errors, Arnold spends little time trying to vindicate himself.²⁵ Instead of criticizing Newman's claims, he claims that Newman is "entirely right when he talks of my ignorance. And yet, perverse as it seems to say so, I sometimes find myself wishing, when dealing with these matters of poetical criticism, that my ignorance were even greater than it is." Erudition, Arnold claims, can too easily destroy the balance necessary to see the "thing itself" (*Last Words* 174). Arnold claims that it is precisely Newman's correctness that caused him to fail:

This correctness of his is the very rock on which Mr. Newman has split. He is so correct that at last he finds peculiarity everywhere. The true knowledge of Homer becomes at last, in his own eyes, a knowledge of "peculiarities, pleasant and unpleasant." Learned men know these "peculiarities," and Homer is to be translated because the unlearned are impatient to know them too. (*Last Words* 184)

Arnold finds Newman's approach to be a desecration of a text that he reveres. Newman, while admiring the *Iliad*, sees no reason to treat it with such reverence and blames Arnold for this theologically motivated usurpation of authority. Instead of responding to Newman's criticism of his dogmatism, Arnold becomes even more dogmatic, using the quoted words of Christ, which Newman had rejected in their original source, in order to justify his critical vagaries. When discussing the complaint of his critics, that they don't understand what Arnold means by "the grand style" that Arnold finds necessary for any translation of Homer, Arnold responds that verbal definitions for the grand style are inadequate:

One may say of it as is said of faith: "One must feel it in order to know what it is." But, as of faith, so too one may say of nobleness, of the grand style: "Woe to those who know it not!" For those, then, who ask the question What is the grand style? with sincerity, I will try to make some answer, inadequate as it must be. For those who ask it mockingly I have no answer, except to repeat to them, with compassionate sorrow, the Gospel words: *Moriemini in peccatis vestris*, Ye shall die in your sins. (*Last Words* 188)

By quoting John 8:24, where Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their unbelief, Arnold shows his complete inability to enter into dialog with Francis Newman. Arnold puts himself in the place of Christ, and a cultured, Latin-speaking Christ at that. Newman has already complained in *Phases of Faith* of Christ's esoteric teaching and unjustifiable rebukes. Arnold states Christ's words in Latin, taking the superior attitude which Newman found displeasing in its own right in the gospel accounts of Christ and absolutely objectionable for anyone who was not the Messiah. Arnold claimed in a letter to his mother in 1862 that he used Latin to show that he was joking: "I hope Homer will be found readable – perhaps there is some little doubt about the motto to that – but I put it in the Vulgate-Latin, as I always do when I am not earnestly serious" (2.129).²⁶ However, even critics who admired Arnold did not always admire this attempt at humor.²⁷

Arnold, unlike Newman, did not mind the authority of texts. He rather liked the way that Scriptural authority could clear up a point. In the same letter to his mother, Arnold wrote,

The Bible is the only book well enough known to quote as the Greeks quoted Homer, sure that the quotation would go home to every reader – and it is quite astonishing how a Bible sentence clinches and sums up an argument. "Where the State's treasure is bestowed," &c. – for example, saved me a least [*sic*] half a column of disquisition. The Methodists do not mind it the least, they like it – and this is much in its favour. (2.129)

The Bible, like the Articles, and like Arnold's rules about Homeric translation and literary criticism, functioned as a shortcut for rational argument. Although Arnold does not believe in the infallibility of the biblical text, he twists that text in order to support his authority as a critic. For Arnold, indeed, literary criticism had usurped the role of biblical criticism not only by borrowing and employing all its techniques, as Suzy Anger discusses in *Victorian Interpretation*, but by practically overlaying the biblical story onto the literary criticism. Arnold's *Last Words* are replete with biblical allusions. Indeed, Arnold takes the biblical work of God as a symbol of the work of the critic, who begins by making order out of chaos, lays down the law of what is right and what is wrong, and ends with a final, imminent judgment:

Any one who can introduce a little order into this chaos by establishing in any quarter a single sound rule of criticism, a single rule which clearly marks what is right as right, and what is wrong as wrong, does a good deed.... Of course no one can be sure that he has fixed any such rules ... but somewhere or other, in the literary opinion of Europe, if not in the literary opinion of one nation, in fifty years, if not in five, there is a final judgment on these matters. (*Last Words* 172)²⁸

Of course, Arnold's critical Apocalypse has yet to happen. Arnold's opinions merely compounded the problems associated with the burgeoning genre of literary criticism. For Arnold, religion had shifted away from the supernatural and into the realm of conduct, the realm Newman also approved for religion. But for Arnold, right and wrong themselves were no longer associated merely with conduct. As Arnold would write later in his 1873 *Literature and Dogma*, "if conduct is necessary (and there is nothing so necessary), culture is necessary" (xxvii). Arnold desired a literary right and wrong, "a public force of correct literary opinion, possessing within certain limits a clear sense of what is right and wrong, sound and unsound, and sharply recalling men of ability and learning from any flagrant misdirection of these their advantages" (*Last Words* 172).

In *Literature and Dogma* Arnold would seek a basis for religion that was deeper than dogma, which seemed to Arnold an *Aberglaube*, an extra-belief, a fairy-tale-like invention that Jews and Christians told themselves as a basis for their conduct (*Literature and Dogma* 70). However, Arnold consistently showed himself to desire more and more doctrine when it came to literary criticism. Newman sought to remove literary criticism (which for him was a question of historicity, truth, and accuracy) from religion. Arnold added religion to his literary criticism, putting literature under the religious authority that Newman despised.

As scholars rethink theories of secularization and the Victorian shift from sacred to secular hermeneutics, Newman and Arnold's debate deserves further consideration. Until recently, Newman's religious and literary opinions have been relegated to Matthew Arnold's portrayal of them in his essays, his *Last Words*. When the texts in the debate are re-examined, Arnold's authoritative critical positions become suspect. Despite the fact that Arnold cheerfully admitted his ignorance of the intricacies of ancient Greek, Arnold's position is granted authority: culture is better than pedantry and Homer's manner is noble. When Newman's works are read, it quickly becomes apparent that he suffered the consequences of the nineteenth-century confusion over textual interpretation. Arnold, on the other hand, benefited from his own willingness to pass over the necessity of interpreting inconvenient texts such as the Anglican Articles. Newman, by refusing to sign those Articles, lost his Balliol fellowship and his platform as an able translator of Greek. But justice aside, Newman and Arnold's argument shows the increased difficulty of interpreting the *Iliad* in the nineteenth century. The fierce critical debates over the proper portrayal of unstable ancient texts only highlight the impossibility of reading them without a critical voice of authority. Arnold chose the authority granted to him by Oxford while Newman relied on his knowledge of methods of textual criticism. However, as is apparent from Newman's admiration of a poem that went counter to many of his most deeply held principles, even Newman was not as free from the *Iliad*'s cultural authority as he liked to believe.

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Notes

¹ Arnold wrote, "for want of appreciating [Homer's] nobleness, Mr. Newman, who has clearly seen some of the faults of his predecessors, has yet failed more conspicuously than any of them" (215). The three lectures that would become *On Translating Homer* were given on 3 November 1860, 8 December 1860, and 26 January 1861. Arnold had the book ready for publication even as he gave his last lecture; Longmans advertised it in the *Times* on 29 January (CPW 1.239). Newman published *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice* in June 1861. Arnold's *Last Words* was given in lecture form on 30 November 1861 and published by Longmans in March 1862 (CPW 1.248-49).

² See Lionel Trilling's 1939 biography of Arnold, pp. 167-78, and Noel Annan's account in the 18 March 1944 *New Statesman and Nation* XXVII, p. 191. See also *Matthew Arnold, Prose Writings: The Critical Heritage*, where Newman is negatively and briefly introduced as "an incredibly learned, eccentric man" who in his *Reply* had written "a long, windy rebuttal, another example of all that Arnold had censured in the translation itself" (69).

The criticism of Newman's translation and his *Reply* was far more nuanced in the nineteenth-century than the twentieth, even though reviewers generally found fault with Newman's *Iliad* translation. Almost all of the nineteenth-century critics agreed that Newman was a better scholar of Greek than Arnold (though an abysmal poet), almost all disliked Arnold's tone toward Newman, and almost all believed that Arnold's sample hexameter translations were at least as bad as Newman's odd diction and meter. Before Arnold's lectures were given, Thomas M'Nicoll of the *London Quarterly Review* gave Newman's translation an enthusiastically positive review (1858), and Henry Furneaux gave Newman a thoughtful mixed review in the *National Review* (1860). Furneaux insisted on the importance of not comparing Newman's translation with past translations of Homer; Newman had departed from these deliberately. "It would be unjust and ungenerous," Furneaux wrote, "to deny that Mr. Newman's translation has many and peculiar merits. For instance, it is by far the most literal that has ever been written in

English; all the constant epithets, almost all the particles, find their place, and the Greek is rendered line for line, and almost word for word. Still we seem to feel that, notwithstanding all this literal exactness, we have but the bare skeleton of the Greek without its poetry” (291).

After Arnold weighed in on the translation question, opinions of Newman’s translation worsened, but agreement with Arnold’s precepts regarding the proper way to translate Homer was far from unanimous. Fitzjames Stephen in the *Saturday Review* claimed that “whenever it is purely a question of taste – except as to the goodness of Mr. Arnold’s own translations – Mr. Arnold has the best of it; but whenever it becomes a question either of reasoning or of scholarship, the London Professor of Latin makes very short work of the Oxford Professor of Poetry” (96). Many other writers agreed with Stephen that Arnold’s sample translations were bad. See the *North British Review* (188) and *The Atlantic Monthly* (144). And other scholars, while still faulting Newman’s poetry, continued to take his work and his translation theory seriously. J.S. Blackie in *Macmillan’s* praised the accuracy of Newman’s translation: “I, for one, when I am puzzling myself over any knotty passage, never think I have done my work thoroughly till I see what Newman makes of it” (271).

³ Thomas M’Nicoll, editor of the Methodist *London Quarterly Review*, began his overwhelmingly positive review of Newman’s *Iliad* translation by comparing Homer’s creation with God’s. Both works were being increasingly attacked by atheists: “[Homer’s] very existence has been stoutly denied; but none has been able to dissolve the integrity or challenge the perfection of his works. And is any greater honour possible to the poet than this, that his enemies should rush forward in the spirit of atheism, and fall back under its silent but perpetual rebuke? – that the author of the Tale of Troy divine should lie under the same imputation as the Maker of this goodly frame, the earth...?” (334).

⁴ McKelvy claims that the first hint of “the threat from Germany” did not involve criticism of Scripture but rather appeared with Thomas Arnold’s 1825 *Quarterly Review* article on Barthold Niebuhr’s mythological understanding of Livy’s works in his *History of Rome*.

⁵ In *Phases of Faith* (1850), Newman writes, "When I was rather more than seventeen, I subscribed the 39 Articles at Oxford in order to be admitted to the University. Subscription was 'no bondage,' but pleasure" (2). In October of 1862, in his article, "Essays and Reviews: Dr. Lushington's Judgment," Newman comments explicitly on Maurice's pamphlet, "We are aware that there is a theory held by some amiable and eccentric clergymen, that *Subscription is no Bondage*. A pamphlet with this title, some years back, was not welcomed by the High Church as containing a true and noble thought, but on the contrary brought on the author the rough sarcasm of being ready to subscribe anything without feeling bound to believe it. But if one can seriously hold subscription to be no bondage, the recent criminal prosecutions for ever put an end to such a notion" (304).

⁶ These included David Walther's *Some Reply to 'Phases of Faith'* (1851), John Nelson Darby's *The Irrationalism of Infidelity* (1853), Henry Rogers' popular *The Eclipse of Faith: Or, A Visit to a Religious Skeptic* (1852), and *A Defence of the Eclipse of Faith* (1854).

⁷ Arnold wrote in *Last Words* that the bad criticism he read regarding Homer confirmed his opinion of the critical failure of the British: "I declared, in a former lecture on this subject, my conviction that criticism is not the strong point of our national literature. Well, even the bad criticisms on our present epic which I meet with, serve to illustrate this conviction for me" (185).

⁸ In *The Soul*, Newman attempts to remove moral authority from miracle and to put it into the hands of "collective humanity," which must "discern" it to be right: "Morals [cannot] be made argumentatively to depend on facts of remote history, without disowning the universality of moral obligation.... If I am to obey the Ten Commandments *on the ground that* a divine voice pronounced them from Mount Sinai (and not because I and you and collective humanity discern them to be right), every one of us needs to ascertain a very distant and obscure matter of history, before he is under obligation to obey the decalogue" (4).

⁹ In *The Soul*, Newman wrote even against fairies: "the writing and reading of fairy tales, in prose or verse, if I do not mistake, exerts whatever

influence it has in the direction of deadening the religious sense. Those who people the vague, unseen, and infinite world with beings not much superior to us, and in a moral aspect often inferior; who become as it were familiar with these creations of their fancy; not only can feel no reverence to *them*, but just in proportion as they realize the ideas, incapacitate themselves for any reverence at all" (15).

¹⁰ Newman believed that readers of the Bible needed a critical guide, unlike readers of the *Iliad*. In "The Religious Mischiefs of Credulity" (1879), Newman wrote, "To make the reading [of the Bible] safe to young people and to those who are unused to active criticism, a perpetually hostile commentary is all but necessary" (*Miscellanies* II, 360). For the *Iliad*, Newman had no such qualms. In fact, he claimed that he made his translation specifically for people with little training in reading critically: "My sole object is," he wrote, "to bring Homer before the unlearned public" (*Reply* 6).

¹¹ Arnold writes at one point that Dr. Maginn, who has called Homer graphic, "forgets our fourth axiom, – that Homer is not *only* graphic; he is also noble, and has the grand style" (244).

¹² "Many acts and words which would be *right* from an incarnate God, or from an angel, are (in my opinion) highly *unbecoming* from a man" (*Phases* 209).

¹³ In a letter to the *Times* after Arnold's death, E. Walford reminisces, "I am the only survivor of a batch of five freshmen who were matriculated at Balliol on November 28, 1840; and I well remember how, when we waited in the Vice-Chancellor's ante-room for admission, Arnold professed to us his great aversion to sundry statements in the Thirty-nine Articles, which at that time we were all forced to subscribe, especially that article which expresses an approval of the Athanasian Creed, and that which denounces and renounces the Pope of Rome" (13).

¹⁴ Arnold would criticize Newman, Bishop Colenso of Natal, and even the Essayists of *Essays and Reviews* for what he perceived as their reductive approach to religion. In his 1863 *Macmillan's* article, "The Bishop and the Philosopher," Arnold contrasted Bishop Colenso's *The*

Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined (1862) with Spinoza's work, accusing Colenso of writing a book "neither edifying [the little instructed] nor informing [the much-instructed] ... neither good for the many nor yet for the few" (242). In a December 1862 letter to his mother, Arnold wrote, "the heresy on both sides being equal, Spinoza broaches his in that edifying and pious spirit by which alone the treatment of such matters can be made fruitful, while Colenso and the English Essayists, from their narrowness and want of power, more than from any other cause, do not" (2.163). In another letter, Arnold claims that the clergyman remains in a sound position when he "abstain[s] from dealing with speculative matters at all – he may confine himself to such matters as Stanley does, or to pure edification.... But the moment he begins to write for or against Colenso he is inevitably in a false position" (2.172).

¹⁵ In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold also claims that "it would have been better for a man, through the last eighteen hundred years, to have been a Christian, and a member of one of the great Christian communities, than to have been a Jew or a Socinian; because the being in contact with the main stream of human life is of more moment for a man's total spiritual growth, and for his bringing to perfection the gifts committed to him, which is his business on earth, than any speculative opinion which he may hold or think he holds" (21).

¹⁶ Fitzjames Stephen defended Newman against Arnold's derision in the 27 July 1861 *Saturday Review*, writing, "Mr. Arnold asks ... 'with whom Mr. Newman can have lived.' It is easy to answer that at one time at least of his life, [Newman] 'lived with' the other Fellows of Balliol and that his academical honours were considerably higher than those of the present Poetry Professor" (95). Arnold believes that Stephen's remark misses the point: "As if [living with the fellows of Balliol] made Mr. Newman's glossary less inexplicable to me! As if he could have got his glossary from the fellows of Balliol!" (*Last Words* 171). If the point is Newman's glossary, Stephen has in fact missed it. However, I maintain that Stephen, the lawyer who would defend the *Essays and Reviews* authors, mentions Balliol in order to place this debate in its larger context, a

context in which it matters that Newman and Jowett were both fellows in the Oxford college where Arnold and Clough had been undergraduates.

¹⁷ Owen Chadwick reports in *The Victorian Church* that Jowett, appointed to his post in 1855, was suspected by many of heresy. The vice-chancellor, Dr. R.L. Cotton, asked Jowett to re-subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles: "Jowett consented, loathing. One side reported that he faltered when he signed, the other that he coolly asked for a new pen. He knew himself humiliated before the world. He felt signing to be the meaner part, a schoolboy degradation. On returning to his room, his first angry words were, 'They have done me harm. But I shall live it down'" (1.553).

¹⁸ Oxford, where professors, fellows, and students were required to subscribe to the Articles, was stricter than Cambridge, where fellows and M.A.s merely promised to conform to the Liturgy of the Church of England.

¹⁹ Ten years later, on 6 July 1870, a writer in the *Times* argued that maintaining Tests was futile: "What good have they, as a matter of fact, done to the University? Have they afforded any of that security for orthodox religious teaching for which they are professedly valued? The facts are unmistakable. The movements which of late years have shaken traditional beliefs to their foundation have had their origin in Oxford itself – in the Oxford of Tests, Subscriptions, and innumerable Safeguards" ("The Third Reading of the University Tests Bill" 9).

²⁰ Newman praised most of Jowett's *Review of the Epistles of St. Paul*, making an exception regarding the essay, "Casuistry," in which Jowett had written, "In daily life cases often occur, where *we must do as other men do*, ... even though unable to reconcile a particular practice with the letter of truthfulness, or *even* to our individual conscience. It is hard in such cases to lay down a definite rule. But *in general we should be suspicious of any conscientious principle in which other good men do not share*" (qtd. in "Jowett and the Broad Church" 34, italics Newman's). Newman claimed that he anticipated that Jowett would say Christianity's martyr spirit had been "*too much and too indiscriminately admired*" (36). "Yet we cannot resign the conviction, that where the martyr spirit is extin-

guished, no new and quickening morality will ever rise in a nation.... And what, after all, is that 'walking by faith' of which Professor Jowett knows how to write so well, if it be not the resolute doing, or refusing to do, that which we see to be right or wrong, without calculating how it is to affect the rest of our lives?" (36).

²¹ "Of course, everyone knows this is not a new question," maintained a writer in the *Illustrated Times* in February 1861, "not entirely new even in the Church of England; for, not to mention such arch heretics as Froude and Francis William Newman, who both seceded, who does not remember the fierceness with which Dr. Hampden was assailed ... and the constant attacks to which Mr. Maurice, suspected at least of too much latitude on this point, has been subjected.... But it is something new and strange to see scepticism in high, if not the highest, places in the English Church" (reprinted in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* 6). The uproar over clergy with these views did lead to a heresy trial. On 1 June 1861, Walter Hamilton "sent Letters of Request to the Court of Arches, under the rules of the [Discipline Act of 1840], asking that [Rowland] Williams be tried on the ground that he had infringed the formularies of the Church of England" (Ellis, 177). Henry Bristow Wilson would also be tried under Dr. Stephen Lushington at the Court of Arches. Lushington took eighteen months to consider his judgment and read through *Essays and Reviews* twenty times. He rejected many of the charges, but he found that Williams had violated Articles VI, VIII, XI, and XXI. Wilson was found to have violated Articles VI, XVIII, and XX (Ellis 183-85). On 15 December 1862, Williams and Wilson were suspended *ab officio et beneficio* for one year. The Privy Council would overturn the ruling in February 1864 (185, 189).

²² The *Times* contains a similar report (9).

²³ If we look at the Newman's approach to this debate over translation, it also becomes apparent that his literary philosophy is similar to his theological philosophy. In his response to Arnold, Newman discusses his translation with an eye to the sort of historical criticism he would apply to a biblical text. Rather than believe the poet used the odd idiom, 'screaming like a snowy mountain,' Newman doubted the text: "I cannot believe that

the poet wrote anything so absurd. Rather than admit this, I have suggested that the text is corrupt.... Yet, as far as I know, I am the first man that has here impugned the text” (*Reply* 54). As in his approach to the gospels, Newman also had doubts on the question of authorship: “Although I do not believe in a unity of authorship between the Odyssey and the Iliad, yet in the Iliad itself I see such unity, that I cannot doubt its negligences to be from art” (71). Like Arnold’s, Newman’s pronouncements sometimes appear subjective, but they are consistent with his thinking.

²⁴ Newman, irritated, responds by saying, “Mr. Arnold informs his Oxford hearers that ‘his bibliolatry is perhaps excessive.’ So the public will judge, if he says that *wench, whore, pate, pot, gin, damn, busybody, audience, principality, generation*, are epical noble words because they are in the Bible, and that *lief, ken, in sooth, grim, stalwart, gait, guise, eld, hie, erst*, are bad, because they are not there. Nine times out of ten, what are called ‘poetical’ words are nothing but antique words, and are made ignoble by Mr. Arnold’s doctrine” (*Reply* 89).

²⁵ The points Arnold does dispute are minor, though significant for the purpose of my argument. Newman had compared the way Homer sounded to Sophocles to the way Chaucer sounds to us. Arnold, in *Last Words*, admits the archaism, but he chooses (again) to compare Homer to the Bible, claiming that it would not sound like Chaucer, but rather like the Authorized version:

Homer’s verses were some of the first words which a young Athenian heard. He heard them from his mother or his nurse before he went to school; and at school, when he went there, he was constantly occupied with them. So much did he hear of them that Socrates proposes, in the interests of morality, to have selections from Homer made, and placed in the hands of mothers and nurses, in his model republic; in order that, of an author with whom they were sure to be so perpetually conversant, the young might learn only those parts which might do them good. His language was as familiar to Sophocles, we may be

quite sure, as the language of the Bible is to us. (179–80)

Socrates here apparently takes a similar position to Newman. Worrying about the effect of a poem of mixed morality, he advises that the moral parts be separated from the rest so that the children will not be corrupted.

²⁶ "The motto to 'Last Words,' *On Translating Homer* (Super 1:168) is the very perfection of deftness: 'Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet I do not decline from thy testimonies' (Psalm 119:157)" (*Letters* 2.129).

²⁷ Henry Hill Lancaster, in the *North British Review*, spoke positively of Arnold's literary criticism but faulted him for arrogance, affectation, and foppery (83, 93). "One form of affectation, frequent with Mr. Arnold, is specially objectionable, we mean the inappropriate use of scriptural phraseology. Thus he took as a motto for his "Last words," *multi, qui persequuntur me, et tribulant me: a testimoniis non declinavi*.... We assure Mr. Arnold that this sort of thing cannot fail to offend; and, perhaps, he will be not less moved by the consideration that people will probably accuse him of having caught the trick of it from Mr. Carlyle, though certainly Mr. Carlyle is never so distasteful in his allusions" (89).

²⁸ Redemption is missing from Arnold's metaphor – as it is missing from his definition of Christianity, which consists of righteousness and upright human conduct.

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