

“How Theologians and Historians Approach the Same Bible Differently” by Daniel Kohanski

There are several ways one can approach the Bible (including ignoring it), but I want to look here at two the most common ways: that of the theologian and that of the historian. The Jewish or Christian theologian begins as someone who, for professional as well as personal reasons, takes the Bible as the literal word of God. Or who says the Bible was dictated by God to people who may or may not have heard him correctly. Or maybe it was written by people who were inspired by God but who may have let some of their own ideas get in the way. In all events, to a theologian the word of the Bible is, more or less, the word of the Lord. A modern historian (except for a theologian trying to be a historian) will not start with any such claims.

Though it is something of an over-simplification, it may be useful to explain the different approaches taken by the theologian and the historian as using two different reasoning techniques: *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Theologians approach the Bible as true *a priori*—they assume it is true in advance of any examination. They will argue over the details; they will give priority to the most sacred parts—the Torah for the Jews, or the Gospels for the Christians—if necessary to resolve conflicts. But they cannot permit themselves to question their fundamental assumption that the Bible somehow came from God, not if they want to maintain their profession as theologians.

As an example, let us turn to the Talmud, the collection of rabbinic discussions about the law as found in the Hebrew Scripture. The rabbis invented a number of clever logical tools to help them extract every possible shade of meaning from the ancient texts and to resolve clashes between one text and another.¹ But occasionally, despite their best efforts, they were stumped. When that happened, they would throw up their hands and declare “*teyku*” (תקי), meaning that the question would have to stand unresolved.² In other words, they knew there was an answer that preserved the sanctity of the texts even if they just couldn’t see it for themselves.

Historians do the opposite. They do not have to take *teyku* for an answer, as it were. They approach the Bible *a posteriori*—they do not assume in advance that it is true. They will look to apply the classic rule for historians, as for the humanities and sciences in general, Occam’s Razor—the simplest explanation that covers all the known evidence, the explanation that makes the most sense, is the one most likely to be correct. Another rule, more specific to the history of religion, is Hume’s Maxim: extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. If one makes a claim of a supernatural event and there is a natural explanation, we must accept the natural one instead.

Consider the claim that Joshua made the sun and the moon stand still (Josh. 10:12-13). Although the sun and moon appear to move across the sky, really it’s the earth that moves. The earth spins on its axis at about a thousand miles an hour at the equator. If Joshua had indeed stopped the earth in its tracks, there would have been earthquakes and tsunamis of unimaginable proportions, and the whole planet would have been destroyed. The claim requires extraordinary evidence for us to accept, and there is none. (The book of Joshua is not evidence; it’s the claim.) However, there is a natural explanation that makes sense. We have evidence that the book of Joshua was largely composed in the period when the kingdom of Judah was a vassal state in the Assyrian empire. Biblical scholar Thomas Römer explains that the sun and moon were major Assyrian deities, such that the story of Joshua’s stopping them in the sky was a way of saying that

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Institute members are raising our post-pandemic public profile, reviving in-person activities as well as continuing virtual programming. These events provide opportunities for all members to become more involved in the life of the Institute.

On May 13th at the annual Open House of the San Francisco Public Library, Merced Branch, Institute members offered our brochures and bookmarks and donated history books to many of the 533 visitors. Special thanks go to Rob Robbins, Jody Offer, and Tim Welsh for donating history books for the giveaway and for representing us at the event. Several of the people who visited the IHS table requested more information. As the Merced Branch manager, I was pleased to see the public interest in our organization.

The Institute will also participate in the January 2024 American Historical Association Annual Meeting in San Francisco by sponsoring the session, “Tourism and History: From Soviets to Space to Anti-Tourism.” Bert Gordon has assembled a distinguished panel: University of Florida doctoral candidate Alexey Kotelvas: “War and Peace: Images of World War II in Early Thaw (mid-1950s) Soviet Travelogues”; Emily Margolis, a curator at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory: “Space for Play: Inspiring the Next Generation of STEM Workers at US Space Camp, 1982-1996”; and University of Victoria Associate Professor Kristin Semmens: “‘Tourists Go Home!’: Exploring the History of Anti-Tourism.” The day and time of the panel session will be announced later.

Rose Marie Cleese has thoughtfully arranged two tours for Institute members in September and October: see page 8.

Dan Kohanski has continued to schedule a fascinating array of monthly programs delivered by Institute members. These are held at 2:00 p.m. on the third Sunday of most months.

Please partake of these and other Institute offerings and, if you have not done so already, volunteer to assist at events or offer to present a program on your area of historical interest. Sharing your talents and knowledge with other members will enhance the Institute for all.

– *Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada*

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MONTHLY PROGRAMS

“Mindful Surrealism—Practice-Based Research in San Francisco”

In January new member **Nathan Foxton**, an artist, presented an overview of his research into the influence surrealism had on the San Francisco art scene and “the development of modernist identity in general.” Having recently moved to the Bay Area, and recognizing surrealist influences in his own work dating to his acquaintance with artist Ramon Santiago as a youth, he felt motivated to understand this history as a way of strengthening his own practice as an artist. By “mindful” he references the long West Coast history of engaging with Eastern philosophies.

Nathan’s research methods involved exploring collections of artists’ papers (Ted Joans, Aya Tarlow, Bruce Connor, Lawrence Ferlinghetti) stored at the Bancroft Library and elsewhere; reviewing issues of *Re/Search*, a small San Francisco counterculture magazine and interviewing its founder Vale; digging out old articles in *Artforum* and reviews of museum exhibitions; and interviewing artists, writers, and gallerists.

Nathan began with André Breton, the French author of the Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, who defined surrealism as “pure psychic automatism through which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, or in any other manner, the true functioning of thought.” A 1937 “Exhibition of Fantastic Art” at the new San Francisco Museum of Art (now SF MOMA) gave surrealism its first institutional presence on the West Coast. Salvador Dali worked in Monterey during the 1940s, at one point throwing an elaborate party to help support the diaspora of European artists displaced by the war. He showed part of an amusing newsreel about the party, “Dizzy Dali Dinner,” attended by Bob Hope and other celebrities.

Beginning in the 1950s, a building in the Fillmore called Painterland became an artistic center, housing artists including Jess Collins, co-founder of the influential King Ubu Gallery. Later known as Six Gallery, it was the site of the famous first reading of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*. Bruce Connor made a movie about the removal of an enormous painting from the house when rising rents resulted in the artists dispersal. Nathan showed interesting bits of his research that he came across, including found poetry, collages, “exquisite corpse” exercises, sketches, reviews and other artifacts, as well as works by Jess, Wallace Berman, Wolfgang Pollan, painters who exhibited together as Dynaton, and J.L. King.

Surrealism had a strong influence on the Beats. The longest-lasting group of American artists who called themselves surrealists continued for decades in Chicago. In Ferlinghetti’s papers Nathan found a scathing review the Chicago artists had written of a SF MOMA show. They thought it attempted to “fix surrealism in formaldehyde” when, to them, it remained a living, revolutionary force. He explored the changing sense of the term over the years; contemporary artist Cynthia Tom thinks it a “convenient term” for discussing work she uses in “processing trauma.”

Towards the end of his presentation Nathan shared a few of his own works in progress, discussing how he attempts to work “automatism” into his artistic process.

– *Jim Gasperini*

“Designed for Large Explosions: The Port Chicago Explosion and the Manhattan Project”

In our April 16 presentation, **Daisy Brown Herndon** presented a survey of some surprising findings from her 15 years of research into the well-documented but little-known link between

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the Manhattan Project (that created the atomic bomb) and the July 17, 1944 explosion at the Port Chicago Naval Ammunition Depot near San Francisco.* The massive blast demolished two ships, killing 320 Americans, including 202 Black sailors. Only 51 bodies were found intact; a local newspaper reported “most victims atomized.” Yet the Port Chicago explosion—which registered 3.4 on the Richter scale and was felt as far away as Nevada—was soon upstaged by the Port Chicago mutiny.

The court martial of 50 Black sailors who refused to load ammunition onto ships after the blast was authorized by a memo dated July 14, 1944, three days before the blast. According to Daisy the inexplicable timing may be a clue to the cover story of the Spring 1982 issue of *The Black Scholar*, in which Peter Vogel raised the controversial question that led to Daisy’s research: “The Port Chicago disaster—was it a nuclear explosion?”

Many other little-known facts and coincidences counter “common sense” objections to the theory of a nuclear explosion. For example, on July 17th, the day of the Port Chicago explosion, Manhattan Project leaders, meeting at the University of Chicago, made the fateful decision to “shelve” the “Thin Man” plutonium bomb, the first (but nearly forgotten) atomic bomb model that was the predecessor to the “Little Boy” uranium bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Notably absent from that meeting was Navy Captain William S. Parsons, the experimental engineer who headed the Los Alamos Laboratory Ordnance Division—the team responsible for creating and delivering the bomb. Within days of the explosion, Parsons and his team appeared at Port Chicago. Their purpose, according to Parsons, was to study “the effects of the detonation.” In a 1948 address to the Naval War College, Rear Admiral Parsons (the first “atomic admiral”) acknowledged that the Port Chicago data provided the first realistic estimate of blast damage from the atomic bomb.

After accompanying Parsons to Port Chicago, his brother-in-law, Captain James Crenshaw, sat on the three-man Court of Inquiry that investigated the explosion. The popular assumption is that the explosion was an accident due to mishandling of ammunition by poorly trained Black sailors. In fact, the Court listed an accident as the second of six most probable causes. Omitting key evidence and testimony from their summary Findings, Opinion and Recommendations, the COI concluded that the cause could not be determined. Their finding that sabotage was unlikely suggests their unawareness of the fact that President Franklin Roosevelt’s fleet for the mid-July cruise to the Honolulu Conference had been anchored at the nearby Mare Island Navy Shipyard in San Francisco during the three-week period leading up to the explosion. (The Honolulu Conference was a semi-secret meeting that President Roosevelt conducted with his top Pacific commanders, General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz.)

The *USS Baltimore*, FDR’s flagship, ordered home from the war in the South Pacific for the special assignment, made two unexplained stops before anchoring at San Francisco on July 6th. The fleet departed for San Diego on the morning of the 17th. The President himself arrived in San Diego on the 19th, after a secret cross-country train trip (which included a pit stop at the Democratic National Convention on the 15th). In his July 20th speech accepting his fourth nomination, FDR acknowledged that he was broadcasting from a naval base on the West Coast. He did not mention Camp Pendleton by name and made no mention of the recent explosion which made international headlines and was the greatest wartime disaster on the American home front.

Another unexplored coincidence revealed by Daisy’s research was Albert Einstein’s work on torpedo design as a consultant for the Navy pursuing the development of an atomic torpedo.

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One of Einstein's colleagues, mathematician John von Neumann, a Manhattan Project consultant, met with Parsons at Los Alamos in November 1943. Einstein's wartime Navy liaison, Lt. Stephen Brunauer, served under Parsons at Operation Crossroads, the 1946 tests of atomic bombs against Navy ships.

Considering some of these points in the discussion period that followed Daisy's presentation, it became clear that whether or not the historic blast was a nuclear test, compelling evidence shows why the controversial, uninvestigated Port Chicago nuclear explosion theory is too important to ignore. Daisy hopes to engage other interested parties in researching and evaluating the many surprising clues to this historic mystery.

– *Dan Kohanski*

* See also DBH, *American Nuclear Deception* (2022).

“One Picture—Several Stories: The Petrograd Children's Colony in Russia and America”

When **Maria Sakovich** first told me about the journey of children from Petrograd in May 1918 I thought it sounded a bit like my adored childhood book, Arthur Ransome's *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, so I wanted to hear more. Her work-in-progress presentation in May was “more.” These children didn't mean to go to sea, either, but they ended up circling the globe and crossing two oceans. As she got deeper into the adventure, I began to realize that Ransome's children experienced nothing, compared with the frightening, unpredictable, and perilous journey of these real children.

Nine hundred children and their teachers and other staff left St Petersburg (then called Petrograd) for a two-month summer sojourn in the country, on the eastern side of the Ural mountains, where there would be ample food and less danger from the unsettled and famine-

like conditions of the past year. In the country, the teachers and parents reasoned, the children could continue their lessons, explore nature, learn new songs, dances, and theater pieces they would perform for each other and local audiences. What started out as a summer sojourn in safety was soon transformed by civil war skirmishes.

The colonies' food supplies began to dwindle; the Soviet rubles that had purchased needed goods lost their value; contact was lost with the children's parents, and a return journey became impossible because the state of the railroads was terrible. Some of the teachers deserted; some found work on the side to bring in money for food. To improve these conditions the children were split into several groups, which worked for some but not all. Some children were reduced to stealing food. Sightings of poorly clothed children began to circulate. (No one had thought to bring winter clothes for the summer months.)

Enter a young English-Russian couple, teacher-translators, who had also left Petrograd to seek a respite from deteriorating conditions. Alfred and Yekaterina Swan, who had recently become a part of a YMCA team in nearby Samara, began to investigate. Eventually they managed to find all the groups and to enlist the support of the American Red Cross who were just starting its Siberian relief work.

With the Red Cross taking charge, Maria's talk detailed bringing the children back together in a self-sustaining agricultural enterprise, the decision to move the children away from the increasingly dangerous fighting of “Whites” and “Reds” to the safer port city of Vladivostok, where the children settled down into a year of school and supervised activities. While always intending to return the children to their families through Siberia, in the end that desire was thwarted. And thus began the voyage by sea. Maria highlighted the work of three dedicated Red Cross workers: Riley Allen, in charge,

Burle Bramhall, taking care of all business, and Hannah Campbell, nurturing everyone and defusing tense situations.

There were stops in San Francisco, where the colonists were warmly welcomed by the city, including Maria's Russian Orthodox priest grandfather (whose picture with a few Colony boys opened the presentation), and in New York, where the group was bombarded by Soviet and White Russian propaganda. Finally the Colonists reached Finland (after a great deal of negotiating by Mr. Allen) and over the course of two and a half months crossed the border into Soviet Russia. A total of 735 children returned; some 43 joined their families in other locations, mostly outside of Russia; a few colonists lost their lives during the long odyssey; and some left the group earlier.

Maria's talk concluded with an epilogue and what she called "echoes." When Stalin came to power, the story of the colonists rescue by the American Red Cross was suppressed; former colonists could not publically acknowledge their remarkable experience without risking loss of educational or job opportunities, or even life.

There are many "echoes"—children being separated from parents due to war or other extreme circumstances. Maria mentioned two of the most recent: the separation of children from parents at the US-Mexico border in 2018 and the current abduction of Ukrainian children by Russia.

The odyssey of these children is unforgettable. Their experience of being away from all they knew without parents, on a seemingly endless wartime journey through a dissolving world is frightening. How they and their caretakers become ever more aware of the need to learn, to endure as they grew is scary, inspiring, and exhausting, and there is real joy, when eventually they return home.

– *Bonda Lewis*

Writers Group

This spring we considered two works of biography. In April and in June, we examined chapters of **Ann Harlow's** joint biography of Anne Bremer (1868-1923) and Albert Bender (1866-1941), "kissing cousins" who helped develop and define the artistic and cultural scene in San Francisco during the first half of the 20th century. Anne was a painter of note, a pioneer of modern art in California. Albert was an important and admired patron of the arts in the Bay Area with a broad range of interests. The two chapters presented trace the background and formative years of Bremer and Bender from the 1860s to the 1890s. Ann's main problem is that despite careful and extensive research, information on the early years of the couple is extremely limited. She compensates for this deficit by writing more extensively about the circumstances, familial and cultural, that surrounded the pair. The group felt that she was definitely on the right track here and encouraged her to expand on this kind of material which would lay a firm foundation for the later sections of the work where the documentary record is much more extensive.

In May we read and discussed two chapters of **Pam Peirce's** biography of her grandmother, Katharine Gibson Wicks (1893-1960). Katharine was a writer best known to the public as a creator of literature for children. But she also wrote a memoir under the pseudonym Jane Hillyer entitled *Reluctantly Told*, a gripping account of her years in a mental institution and of her struggle to recover. Pam seeks to show how Katharine as a storyteller used fairy tales—both those she read and those she created herself—as a means to survive childhood and teenage troubles. After her mother's death, however, she slid into depression leading to suicide attempts. When she emerged from her "asylum stay," she would, for a time, put aside her fairy-tale mindset. But she returned to it

later in her life after finding happiness in a long romantic relationship with a woman and in marriage to an older man she had loved in her youth. In the first of the chapters we read Pam showed how some of the fairy tales that Katharine wrote reflected her own experiences and provide biographical insights. The second chapter is a much more straight-forward account of Katharine's early life and upbringing emphasizing her relationship with her father, whom she adored. The group, which had read several earlier efforts by Pam to tell her grandmother's tale, was very favorably impressed by this new iteration and encouraged her to pursue the lines she had laid out in her detailed outline.

– *Rob Robbins*

Member News

After an eight-year journey, **Dot Brovarney** published *Mendocino Refuge: Lake Leonard & Reeves Canyon* in December. The seed for the book was planted when she chanced upon a trunk of historic photographs revealing early 20th-century life in a remote canyon in the upper Russian River watershed.

Intensive historical research took Dot down multiple paths into this mysterious canyon world. She invites the reader along to explore its wild habitats and discover the humans who made it home or workplace—Native Pomo groups who nurtured and depended on its resources; settlers who claimed the land for ranches; 19th-century loggers who mined old growth redwood and Douglas fir, and their 20th-century counterparts whose practices damaged the watershed; and family landowners, including several intrepid and independent women, whose conservation efforts brought creek restoration and saved old-growth trees, especially in the canyon's upper reaches, including Lake Leonard.

The full-color book, described by Kirkus Reviews as “a captivating homage to a wilderness sanctuary marked, but not spoiled, by human presence,” includes 200 images. It is available exclusively at Mendocino County independent bookstores, and available by phone order (Mendocino Book Company and Grace Hudson Museum), and online (Gallery Books, Kelley House Museum, Historical Society of Mendocino County, and The Book Juggler). For a preview, see: www.mendocinorefuge.com.

“On April 4th,” **Dan Kohanski** writes, “I had a conversation at the Commonwealth Club of California with George Hammond, the director of their Member-Led Forums program, about my latest book, *A God of Our Invention: How Religion Shaped the Western World*. That conversation can be seen on YouTube (<https://www.commonwealthclub.org/events/archive/video/how-religion-shaped-western-world>).

Steve Levi reports that his book *Rat's Nest of Rails* is finally out. He describes it as an “in the weeds” look at the building of the Alaska Railroad, “the only government-funded railway in American history. It was constructed over the most treacherous terrain in the world during the most violent political era in US history. The workforce included anarchists, Bolsheviks, socialists, syndicalists, and labor union organizers. It was built by the United States military to supply the United States Navy with coal and, in the process, closed coal mining in the Territory of Alaska—to the great anger of the private sector.” The book, available in print or as an ebook, can be purchased at www.authormasterminds.com/steve-levi.

Leslie Friedman organized “The Lively Reading” which was presented over Zoom, June 25. Five authors read from their poetry or non-fiction work: Randall Nicholas, poet from Ogden Dunes, Indiana; Judith Offer, playwright, poet, and fellow member of the Institute; Joy Passanante, novelist, short story writer, poet,

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professor emerita of the University of Idaho; David Shepard, poet and psychiatrist, Denver, Colorado; and Leslie herself, historian, author, poet, who read short excerpts from her books *The Dancer's Garden* and *The Story of Our Butterflies* as well as selected poems from *Blessings and Murders*. The event was well received by the audience of 88.

Leslie continues to place review articles, which frequently include historical viewpoints, on the livelyblog (www.livelyfoundation.org/wordpress). A recent post about Igor Levit's piano recital on June 27, for example, noted the extreme similarity of the end of Wagner's Prelude from the opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) and Lizst's Sonata in B minor (1853). Wagner's Prelude was completed six years after Lizst's Sonata. The opera premiered six years after Prelude, in 1865. In 1867, Lizst transcribed for piano *Isolde's* final aria; it became a great success. Lizst, only two years older than Wagner, was his father-in-law. Their relationship was a curious one in music and family. Another article, about Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem," examines the bitter anti-war position represented by Wilfred Owen's poetry and the Catholic Mass for the Dead. When "Requiem" premiered in 1962, the agony of the World Wars had not healed.

Jody (Judith) Offer's alma mater, Nazareth University in Rochester, New York will be producing her play "Just Vote" as part of its 100th anniversary celebration in 2024. "The play takes place in the fall of 1872 when Susan B. Anthony both registered and voted in the presidential election and was later arrested. Since she lived in Rochester and her home is now a museum, it is particularly appropriate for my school to produce it. I will be going back this fall to do workshops with the student actors; later the director of the theater arts program will direct my play and develop related programs."

Jody also notes that in August she will be doing a work-shop with volunteers at North Star, a house of Julia Morgan's design, in Grass Valley. "We will be trying to turn my reading play, "Scenes from the Life of Julia Morgan," into a staged reading or production. Since the new Morgan biography by Victoria Kastner was published, I have done yet another rewrite of the piece."

As I was browsing recently the 1989 issues of *Soviet Life* a familiar name stood out in a caption to a photograph: "Every year many researchers from other countries work in the film archives. One such scholar, **Richard Raath** [sic; should be **Raak**] (standing), compiled an American catalogue of Soviet documentary films about World War II." The article (April 1989) described the collections of the Central State Archives of Documentary Films and Photographs of the USSR. (*Ed.*)

Late Institute member **Carroll Brentano** is being honored at a symposium organized by the UCB Center for Studies in Higher Education, October 5, 4-6 pm, at the Women's Faculty Club. Brentano founded the University of California History Project in 1989 at CSHE and published several volumes of essays with Sheldon Rothblatt and the *Chronicle of the University of California* through CSHE and the Institute of Governmental Studies. This symposium honors her work, particularly her work as it relates to the history of women at Berkeley. Reception to follow; **all Institute members welcome.**

Mark your calendars for **two special events** being offered exclusively to Institute members:

At the **Museo Italo Americano** at Fort Mason in San Francisco, **Saturday, September 9th**, at 10:30 a.m. a docent-led tour of the current exhibition "Bravo: Celebrating San Francisco

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BOOK REVIEW

***The Socialist Patriot: George Orwell and War,*
by Peter Stansky (Stanford University Press,
2023)**

Peter Stansky's new work is a triumph of original, historical understanding. George Orwell's work changed how Western culture looks at governmental structures. Stansky found two, deep currents within Orwell's experience and values: his love of England and his commitment to Socialism. These themes, which others might believe must oppose each other, in Orwell's outlook are necessary supports for each other. Stansky sees Orwell as the Socialist Patriot, a rare combination that consistently appears in his life and writing. By observing Orwell's experience with five wars, Stansky discovered a unique and meaningful approach to Orwell's life.

World War I. Fortunately Orwell (1903-1950) was not old enough to fight and die in a trench. He was the right age to absorb patriotism which was an important subject at school during his early years. His prep school, St. Cyprian's, though he hated it, gave students a saturation level of patriotism. Orwell published two patriotic poems, one about England and one to memorialize Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War. Later, during World War II, Orwell observed that it was good that the middle classes were taken by patriotism, a situation that he previously had criticized. The country needed the middle class's faith in England. Orwell described his own family as upper-lower-middle-class. Despite his socialist view of workers, Stansky notes that Orwell, who attended Eton, often describes English society through traditional class distinctions.

The Spanish Civil War brought two changes. Eric Blair, his real name, became George Orwell and committed himself to socialism. He had published his first books (1933-1936). Three were novels and two non-fiction: *Down and out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan*

Pier, a study of life during the Depression in impoverished north Britain. Orwell wrote in 1947, in the introduction to *Animal Farm* in the Ukrainian edition: "Up to 1930 I did not on the whole look upon myself as a Socialist. In fact I had as yet no clearly defined political views. I became more pro-Socialist more out of disgust with the way the poorer section of the industrial workers were oppressed and neglected than out of any theoretical admiration for a planned society" (PS, 35). Orwell's statement reveals that even as he considered himself a Socialist, his motivation came from empathy with oppressed workers, not from ideology. Their exploitation was not fair. Fairness is a value claimed by English culture.

Stansky points out that this war alerted Orwell to the lies news media printed and generally ballyhooed.

Arriving in Barcelona George Orwell became aware of an array of political parties. John McNair, a news correspondent also interested in becoming a soldier, helped him to sort through options. Stansky notes McNair's hesitation to befriend someone with an Etonian accent, but McNair had read Orwell's books, liked them, and then liked him, but he made sure Eric Blair was not a Stalinist. Orwell had to choose one of several labor-related armies. He chose POUM, Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, the smallest party affiliated with the Independent Labour Party. He went "to the Lenin barracks for a week of pretty much no training" (PS, 45). POUM's members were of diverse class origins; Orwell found companionship in their company. At the Aragon front he saw little action. As he learned more about various parties' goals, he disagreed with the POUM party line "which he construed as making more important the winning of the revolution than the winning of the war" (PS, 47). He decided to transfer to the International Brigade.

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While leftist parties battled each other, the Soviet Union became the main muscle on the Republic's side. The Soviets supplied arms and demanded payment in gold. When Orwell had arrived in Barcelona, he saw an egalitarian society which had done away with capitalism and put the people first. Later, on leave in Barcelona, he saw that ideology had taken first place. He gave up joining the International Brigade. After he was shot in the throat by a sniper, he returned to Barcelona to recover and decided he was no longer a soldier. Orwell, along with McNair left Spain in June 1937. Spain's war made Orwell an anti-Communist yet confirmed his socialism. It is astonishing, but Spain "left him with a greater faith in the fundamental decency of human beings." According to Stansky, Spain "was what made him into a great writer" (PS 52).

Between wars, Orwell wrote two books: the novel, *Up for Air*, celebrates the beauty and peace of the English countryside before 1914, and *Homage to Catalonia*, is the brilliant book about his Spanish Civil War. A bad bout with tuberculosis sent him to a sanatorium for six months. During this time, Orwell's political attitudes changed. Orwell had been against war, but the Russo-German pact, August 1939, dropped the blinkers from his eyes. He became actively pro-war, trying to enlist in any capacity even though his age and bad health kept him from the front.

World War II. It is a tribute to Stansky that he describes issues of World War II that find Orwell off base rather than portray him as a super hero. He had a bizarre attitude toward Hitler. In a review of *Mein Kampf* (strange work to review), he wrote: "I should like to put it on record that I've never been able to dislike Hitler. Ever since he came to power—till then, like nearly everyone, I had been deceived into thinking that he did not matter—I have reflected that I would certainly kill him if I could get

within reach of him, but that I could feel no personal animosity. The fact is that there is something deeply appealing about him" (PS, 59). Why? Was he covering himself in case Hitler won? Other views seem unusual: Orwell began to think pacifists were Fascistic or leaning that way and that the war could bring about Socialism.

In 1941 Fredric Warburg, publisher of *Homage to Catalonia*, his friends Tosco Fyvel, Sebastian Haffner, and Orwell started Searchlight Books in order to publish a series of books explaining the purposes of the war. A paper shortage caused by the Blitz meant they produced ten books but not the eighteen they planned. Orwell's contribution to the series was *The Lion and the Unicorn*. In it he writes about the patriotism he absorbed in his school though he had barely paid attention to World War I. He saw World War II differently; the ties to his patriot self were still there. He realized that the "English genius" is the gift of changing and apparently staying the same. This was the heart of what Orwell wished to protect. "Patriotism has nothing to do with conservatism. It is devotion to something that is changing but is felt to be mystically the same" (PS, 68).

Orwell left the Searchlight project to work for BBC, where he arranged talks by prominent writers. Orwell kept busy writing articles and reviews, but he wanted more time for his own writing. In November, 1943, he began *Animal Farm*. He had maintained his belief in socialism, but he lost faith it could survive. Those in power want more power and to keep power. As Stansky describes, Orwell's experience of war convinced him that a socialist state could improve society, but he wondered if political power would allow it? Orwell supplies the origin of *Animal Farm* in the Preface to the Ukrainian edition. He had seen a boy driving a horse cart whipping the horse. Orwell applied Marx's view of workers being exploited by their

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masters to animals. What if animals organized and overthrew the humans? It was hard to find a publisher for *Animal Farm*. Its basis in the Russian Revolution was clear, and in 1943, the Soviets were allies. Stansky finds an ironic paradox in its publication. It took two years. Fredric Warburg agreed to publish it, but the paper shortage meant that it did not appear until August 1945. By that time, attitudes toward Russia had changed. *Animal Farm* was a best seller. In 1946, Orwell wrote to Dwight Macdonald, publisher of *Partisan Review*, “I meant the moral to be that revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job” (PS, 100). The Russian Revolution was an example of how “socialism could go wrong” (PS, 100). By experiencing war, Orwell found another unlikely hybrid of socialism and patriotism.

The Cold War. The five years left to Orwell after the war were about *Nineteen Eighty-four* and TB. He moved to a remote island in the Inner Hebrides. He contributed the term Cold War as well as Big Brother and other terms created in his books which are now all too appropriate for our real world. *Nineteen Eighty-four* was a huge success in sales and in its impact on society and politics. In short, the left thought it a right wing book and the right thought it was a call to destroy the Soviet Union, to turn the Cold War hot. Orwell never called for destruction of the Soviet Union, but he did hate the totalitarian power to suppress individuals’ lives and thoughts. He wrote in *Look* magazine (1949) that his book is not a prediction, but it is a warning that there are trends which could take us there. “The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: ***Don’t let it happen. It depends on you***” (PS, 127). Orwell and the book came under fire from all directions,

but it and *Animal Farm* were translated into 60 languages and had sold 40 million copies by 1989.

Stansky’s book is inspiring. It demonstrates that historical understanding and new perspectives can evolve, sharpen our views, allow us to see an event or person in more dimensions. Stansky’s awareness of how wars shaped Orwell reveals more of Orwell to us: his socialism, patriotism, and opposition to totalitarianism. There are 42 years between *The Socialist Patriot* and *Orwell: The Transformation*, Stansky’s first biography of Orwell (written with William Abrahams, 1979). Stansky shows that an interest, a mystery, a study does not run its course over time.

– *Leslie Friedman*

Continued from page 8:

Opera—Its Italian Roots and Legacy.” Opera made its appearance during Gold Rush days, but today’s company dates to 1923 when the local Italian American community became its main support for the earliest years. The exhibition is a co-production of the Museo, San Francisco Opera, and the Museum of Performance + Design.

An all-day excursion on **Wednesday, October 4th**, to Stanford University’s Cecil J. Green Library’s **Rumsey Map Center**, at 10.30, and several **rare book collections** in the afternoon; tours led by Assistant Rare Map Librarian and Rare Books Curator. The 90-minute tour will include visits to the Barchas Room (the Special Collections seminar room) and the Albert M. Bender Room (named after the San Francisco philanthropist whose substantial donations formed the core of some of the university’s rare book collections). Sign-up emails with more details will be sent closer to the dates.

Yahweh was in control of the Assyrian gods.³ The author of Joshua was therefore not claiming that Joshua literally stopped the sun and moon; he was reassuring the Israelites that their god was more powerful than the Assyrian gods, powerful enough to make them stand still.

A historian who is not wedded to believing in the Bible as true will be willing to accept this argument (assuming it stands up to the usual scholarly scrutiny). A theologian will have more difficulty doing so—although not necessarily: the medieval Jewish theologian Maimonides acknowledged that “those passages in the Bible, which in their literal sense contain statements that can be refuted by proof, must and can be interpreted otherwise.”⁴

Maimonides remains controversial in Jewish circles even today, nor is his dictum likely to get a hearing from many of the current crop of Christian theologians. We can perhaps get an understanding of why this gap, this chasm, stands between the theologian and the historian by returning to the generalizations offered earlier in this essay: the theologian approaches the Bible *a priori* while the historian does so *a posteriori*. *A priori* uses deductive logic: start with some premises whose truth is assumed, and deduce from them the best (or only) possible conclusion. Premise: all cats are grey; premise: Dewey is a cat; conclusion: Dewey is grey. He’s not; he’s light brown (and also a pest), but by saying that, I have questioned the first premise, and that is anathema in a theological context. *A posteriori* reasoning is inductive: let’s examine the universe of cats and count how many of them are which colors, and determine (induce) whatever conclusions we can from that. (I still deduce that Dewey is a pest who thinks my desk is his sleeping space.)

Deductive reasoning produces definitive conclusions that *must* follow from the premises, while inductive reasoning leads to likely conclusions that are always open to doubt. Historians are able to live with doubt (or should be able to); theologians, not so much. “But ask in faith, never doubting, for one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind,” says the Letter of James in the New Testament. It goes on to warn that the “doubter . . . must not expect to receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6, 8).

If there were a verse in the Bible that read “Truly I say unto you, all cats are grey,” and I doubted whether that was true (there is a non-grey cat on my desk, after all), a theologian might argue that Dewey isn’t really a cat. Or that someday he will be grey. Or that God made me see his color differently in order to test my faith.⁵ Those are the sorts of arguments a theologian might offer. A historian, however, might suggest that whoever wrote that verse probably lived in a town where all the cats were the offspring of a pair of grey cats, and thus knew only grey cats. That is a simple explanation, and one that makes sense, but it’s a natural explanation that takes God out of the picture and leaves the Bible as a fallible document created by human beings. Yet it is exactly the sort of argument that a historian might offer.

So long as theologians look to the Bible for inspiration and hope, they can read it as they like. Once they claim the Bible is actual history, however, then it becomes subject to the way historians read it, with all the doubts and tests that are the historian’s stock in trade. You can approach the Bible as a theologian *or* as a historian, but trying to be both at the same time is like trying to stop the earth from spinning.

1 Talmud study is excellent preparation for law school!

2 See *Chullin* 60b for one of these instances. An alternate reading is ויקרא: “When Elijah comes to announce the messiah, he will answer all questions and difficulties.”

3 Thomas C. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical, and Literary Introduction* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 83–90.

4 Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:25.

5 This last one is a riff on the claim by some fundamentalists that God made dinosaur fossils appear to be millions of years old as a test of our faith.