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DANIEL BOYARIN. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Divinations. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Pp. xv + 374.

Daniel Boyarin's career is perhaps most remarkable for the sheer number of otherwise discrete conversations that he is able to engage—and advance—simultaneously. His most recent book, which traces the generative role that the twinned emergence of Jewish and Christian discourses of "heresy" and "orthodoxy" in Late Antiquity played in the formation of the category of "religion" in the Christian West, is no exception. In it, Boyarin deploys various linguistic and postcolonial theories to explore the dynamic and mutually constituting histories of Judaism and Christianity, interprets familiar New Testament and early Christian texts to expose otherwise neglected dimensions of rabbinic theology, and develops a fundamentally revised history of rabbinic hermeneutics using traditional talmudic redaction-criticism.

But beyond simply integrating disparate source materials and methodologies, this book represents a synthesis in a more profound sense as well. It caps—at least provisionally—Boyarin's larger project of tracing the dialectical nature of Jewish difference and sameness within Western history and culture.

The initial phase of this project (1990–97)[1] was largely predicated on an essential Jewish alterity vis-à-vis the hegemonic reading practices, *habitus*, and gender and sexual norms of the Graeco-Roman and (subsequently) Christian West. This account valorizes the subversive, even carnivalesque potential inherent in diverse Jewish cultural practices—from midrashic indeterminacy to the resistant discourse of Jewish particularism—which contest the seemingly self-evident authority of Western logocentrism, dualism, and pretension to universalism.

Yet, despite the elegance of this structural opposition between dominant and minority cultural regimes, Boyarin seems to have grown suspicious of his own romanticized portrait of the perennially countercultural Jewish "other." Increasingly informed by the thoroughgoing anti-essentialism of postcolonial theory, his more recent work explores the ways

1. *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994); *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993); *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990).

that the Jewish male subject inscribed his own "will to power" on the textual artifacts he produced. What exclusionary practices (e.g., regimes of gender differentiation) were—and continue to be—instrumental in the production and maintenance of rabbinic Judaism as a social and ideational system? And in what ways were and are these broader processes bound up in the history of Western and Christian hegemony in all its various phases, from the Christianization of the Roman Empire to (post)-colonial globalization, including the Zionist-nationalist project?

While Boyarin's earlier work may have contained the seeds of this new line of inquiry, its underlying structure has been fundamentally transformed by the insight that differences between Judaism and Christianity are made and not given. His 1999 book, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford), presents Jews and Christians as participants in a shared religious landscape, in which social and theological demarcation—both internal and external—is continuously renegotiated. In its most extreme formulations, the book argues that Judaism and Christianity throughout Late Antiquity were not in fact discrete entities, as the familial metaphors that are so often used to characterize their relationship (mother/daughter or sister/sister) implicitly presuppose. Drawing from linguistic wave-theory, Boyarin instead proposes that they are better imagined in more local and provisional terms, as dynamic dialects of a single linguistic system in constant flux.

This model of socio-religious interactivity has proven enormously productive to the field of Jewish–Christian relations in Late Antiquity and beyond. But in privileging permeability, fluidity, and contiguity to the almost total exclusion of processes of differentiation, Boyarin converted the hybrid identities forged in the contact zone of "Judaeo-Christianity" from an (ethically neutral) product of asymmetric power-relations into an oddly static and, once again, highly idealized condition. In this revised account, a binary structure of difference has simply been replaced with a provocative, but equally perduring, structure of sameness.

In *Border Lines*, Boyarin seeks to resolve this impasse by setting the semantics of Jewish and Christian difference in an explicitly diachronic framework. While he reaffirms his earlier claim that the messy realities of late antique society often defied the intensifying efforts of cultural elites to police the border between Judaism and Christianity, he now underscores the social efficacy exerted by their strategies of differentiation and classification. Thus, Jewish and Christian theology aimed not only at doctrinal purity but also at social coherence, and was indeed ultimately deployed to produce and regulate a circumscribed range of officially authorized religious identities. Polemical and heresiological discourses,

no more but also no less than any other mode of language, are seen to constitute concrete forms of disciplinary practice.

Boyarin argues that both Christian and Jewish writers of the second and third centuries (c. 100–300 CE) cultivated the notion of "heresy" (*minut* in Hebrew) as a primary mode for articulating religious difference between Judaism and Christianity. He reasons that, like all linguistic systems in which meaning is generated through difference between paired terms, this nascent vocabulary of religious self-definition was both relational and arbitrary. In particular, Boyarin shows, first, that virtually all forms of Second Temple Judaism—including earliest "Christianity"—embraced some form of Logos theology, which posited the existence of a second divine power who mediates between an otherwise wholly transcendent deity and the material world. He then argues that Jewish and Christian heresiologists transformed this pervasive element of "Judaeo-Christian" theology into a site for the production of religious and social difference.

And, not coincidentally, these Jewish and Christian writers found themselves in perfect agreement concerning how the religious landscape ought to be divided. While no "orthodox" Jew could henceforth maintain a belief in "Two Powers in Heaven," no "orthodox" Christian could deny that the Godhead, though unified, was simultaneously compounded of multiple divine "persons." On both sides, an intramural theological dispute was in effect externalized as inter-religious difference: the "heterodox" Jew is now expelled as a Christian and the "heterodox" Christian is excluded as a Jew (or at least a Judaizer). Boyarin thus convincingly sketches the role that the gradual, but relentless Christianization of Logos theology by "proto-orthodox" rabbis and Church Fathers played in the simultaneous institutionalization of rabbinic Judaism and orthodox Christianity.

While this account maps easily onto traditional histories of early Christianity, it radically overturns received wisdom about the nature and emergence of rabbinic Judaism. Jewish historiography has traditionally painted a stark contrast between Christian theology and ecclesiology, which is seen to suppress public debate in the service of doctrinal and institutional uniformity, and the celebration and preservation of multiple and competing opinions in rabbinic culture. Boyarin argues, convincingly I think, that this prominent feature of rabbinic piety only belatedly displaced the stress on doctrinal correctness that the movement had earlier cultivated. Boyarin traces the rabbinic notion of pluralistic truth—the valorization of debate and the principle of scriptural polyvocality that underwrites it—to the sixth-century rabbinic academies of Sassanian

Persia ("Babylonia"). It is only with the emergence of fully institutionalized rabbinic study and its agonistic culture that the dialectical process as such was articulated as a theological ideal (the Oral Torah).

Yet Boyarin refuses to romanticize rabbinic "pluralism," hastening to add that the curiously open-ended literary product of this distinctive form of scholasticism, the Babylonian Talmud, encodes its own regimes of exclusionary practice to be deployed against any who would deny the epistemological validity and practical authority of the halakhic (legal) process. That scholars have mistakenly identified this ideological structure as an essential building-block of rabbinic Judaism only attests to the power of rabbinic narrative and well-disguised editorial revision. Relatively late rabbinic texts have thus successfully crafted a persuasive foundation-myth, which projects the idiosyncratic, though ultimately hegemonic, ideals of the Babylonian academy back to the very origins of the rabbinic movement at the "council" convened at Yavneh (in Roman Palestine) immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

No such ideological adjustment took place in the sphere of orthodox Christianity. Indeed, as Roman imperialism and Christian universalism were gradually merging into a new Christian discourse of Empire, Christian writers increasingly pressed the claim that participation in a doctrinally uniform Christian community—managed under Roman sovereignty—represented a path to salvation open to all people everywhere, regardless of language, ethnicity, or land of origin. But this novel form of social affiliation raised fundamental questions about exactly what type of entity this universal Christian community might be. Whereas "religion" in the Graeco-Roman world had never before constituted a wholly distinct mode of self-definition but had traditionally intersected with all other domains of social and political life, Boyarin argues that, in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, "Christianity's new notion of self-definition via 'religious' alliance was gradually replacing self-definition via kinship and land" (p. 202). Boyarin's account thus offers a useful corrective to recent analyses of the so-called modern invention of religion (especially Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion*). Although undoubtedly distinct in many respects, the Enlightenment/Romantic discourse on religion recapitulated, at least in part, this earlier epistemic shift in Late Antiquity.

From the late antique Christian perspective, the persistence of competing modes of self-definition challenged the social logic that grounded an emergent universal Christianity. According to Boyarin, the disembedding of "religion" from other spheres of social activity did not, therefore, only shape the nature of Christian community but also entailed a wholesale

revision of social categories as such. In the process of shoring up the borders of their own religious community, Christian writers set about systematically applying this new notion of religion as an autonomous category to their competitors. Thus, in some sense, Christianity calls "Judaism" and "Paganism" into existence as recognizable, though essentially false, "religious" entities.

Yet Boyarin argues that, whereas pagan intellectuals such as the Emperor Julian (the Apostate) embraced this development, actively recasting what had previously been the ethno-linguistic category "Hellenism" as a coherent religious system capable of countering Christian hegemony, the rabbis adopted a radically different strategy. They instead affirmed the essential inseparability of *ethnos* and *religio* in the constitution of Jewish identity. In so doing, they did not merely stake out a discrete niche for Judaism within a Christian discursive universe but fundamentally rejected the very premise underlying the Christian construction of Judaism as a "religion" similar in type, but inferior in content, to Christianity. Christianity (and later also Islam) would become the prototype for the category "religion" in Western thought, in both popular and academic discourse. By contrast, the Jewish embrace of categorical ambiguity (from a Christian perspective) produced an abiding difference that continues to condition its anomalous position within Western culture.

Though characteristically brilliant, Boyarin's argument is somewhat limited by the privileged function it grants theological discourse. Christian theology is taken to be the primary, if not sole, factor in the rabbis' initial flirtation with doctrinal self-definition, and then their subsequent refusal of it. I found it especially troubling that pre-Christian Roman law, politics, and culture play so marginal a role in his account of developments in the second and third centuries. As Boyarin himself notes, the semantic shift whereby the Latin term *religio* came to signify fixed religious identity—rather than merely proper religious performance—was already well under way in the second century C.E., thereby preparing the way for the Christian (and Jewish) elaboration of this notion. Accordingly he writes: "Christianity itself was a product of the forces that we come to understand as 'Christianization,' as well as an agent in them" (p. 328, n. 84). This is no minor qualification but raises fundamental questions about Boyarin's overly tidy model of cultural innovation, in which the binary linguistic terms Judaism/Christianity serves as the primary engine of social change. The Roman Empire and its evolving religious culture hardly impinge on his history of this semantic pair in the period before Constantine.

Although he does gesture at the existence of numerous non- or para-

rabbinic forms of late antique Judaism, which have become active objects of research in recent years, Boyarin is little interested in integrating this history into his literary analysis of canonical texts. Stranger still, he does not venture an explanation for precisely why rabbinic culture developed so differently in the non-Christian Sassanian Empire than it did within the political and cultural boundaries of Christian Rome. The reader is simply left to wonder what the relationship is between the Jewish resistance to Christian category-formation in the Roman-Byzantine West and the glorification of dialectical disputation in the Babylonian academy. In the almost total absence of material artifacts, political context, and sociological analysis, the "religions" whose history Boyarin is here writing emerge as peculiarly bloodless linguistic constructs.

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