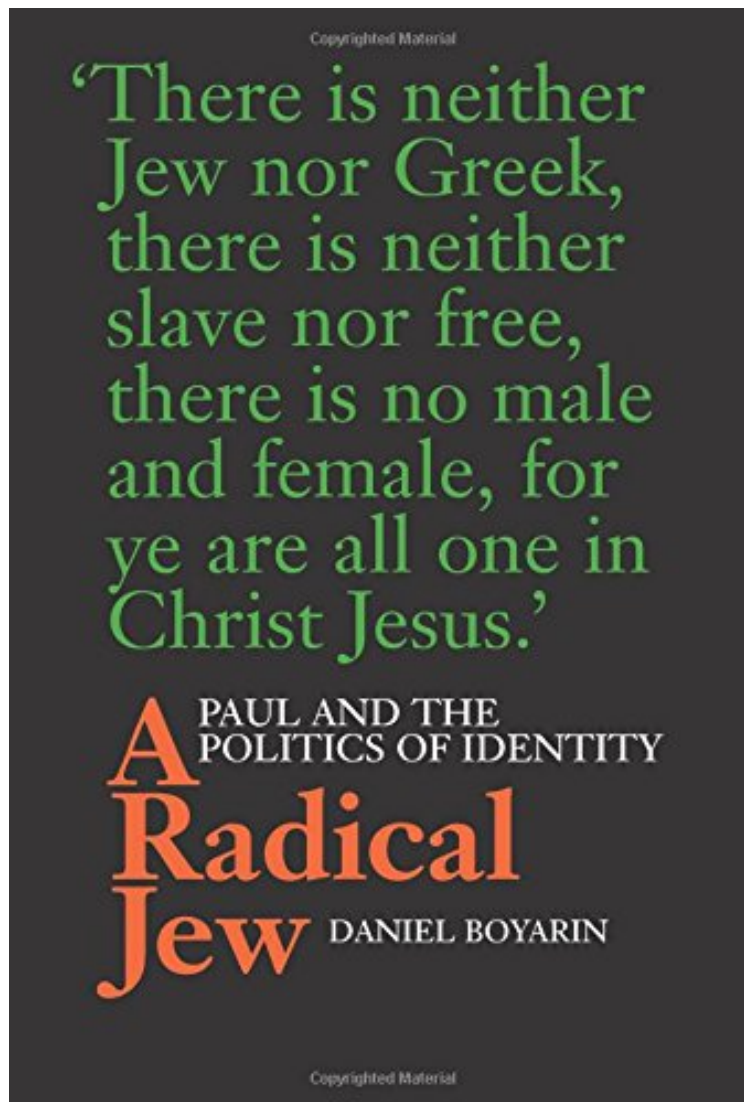


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A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity (Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society)

Daniel Boyarin

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#969637 in Books 1997-11-11 1997-11-11 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.82 x .96 x 5.98l, 1.28 #File Name: 0520212142400 pages | File size: 66.Mb

Daniel Boyarin : A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity (Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity (Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Paul's Treatment of Inclusiveness By John Hudson This is a fun book

to read. It is by a Jewish scholar who gets into a great conversation with the reader on what is going on in Paul's mind as he works through an expanding of relating faith to persons regardless of the Jewish requirement such as circumcision. This is a book to talk with and to. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By peter buikevery informative, not for those who aren't serious about study 28 of 35 people found the following review helpful. Daniel, Be Mindful of Your Audience By Danusha V. Goska I'm a fan of Boyarin's work. There's much to admire. For example, he takes a progressive attitude towards issues of gender, including the status of women and of homosexuals, and he takes this stance as an Orthodox Jew. As a church-going Catholic who actively supports Gay Rights, I admire Boyarin both for his faith and for his support of gender non-conforming people. In a world of intolerant, rigid, and destructive so-called "fundamentalists" and "fundamentalisms" insisting that there is ONLY ONE way to read a text or a tradition, including scripture and the history of Judaism and/or Christianity, insisting that the ONE WAY to read the Judeo-Christian tradition is to read it as male supremacist and oppressive, I greatly appreciate that Boyarin says, as he says so clearly in his introduction to this work and in another book, "Unheroic Conduct," that there are many ways to read texts and traditions. For example, as Boyarin says here, if one uses as one's starting point in Paul the verse, "In Christ there is no male; there is no female; there is no slave nor free man" one will read Paul very differently than others who see, in Paul, an oppressor who upheld slavery and the oppression of women. I also admire Boyarin's wide-ranging store of knowledge, his humanity, his enthusiasm, and his humor. And he takes on issues that this reader enjoys reading about. On the other hand, and it is a big other hand, Boyarin is a self-indulgent writer who has lived a sheltered, purely academic life. He writes as, one imagines, he would talk when talking to someone who shares his interests, his references, his enthusiasms, as closely as would a doppelganger or an imaginary best friend. Boyarin just about never shows any consideration for any audience who might not be an exact duplicate of him. So, the reader has to slog through paragraphs or pages not knowing what Boyarin is talking about, not because the ideas at play are all that complex -- they never really are -- but because neither Boyarin nor his editors have taken the time to frame what Boyarin is saying in a way that will be readily understood by someone who is not sharing the exact same brainpan as Boyarin himself. Oh, how I wish there were an edited version of Boyarin's books, in which references that need not be obscure are presented in a way so that someone who has not lunched with the exact same clique of grad students that Boyarin has lunched with would be able to grasp what Boyarin is saying, without reaching for outside references -- which, sadly, I always have to do when reading Boyarin -- or slogging through his endless, and, yes, self-indulgent footnotes. This is a positive review. Boyarin is, again, well educated, enthusiastic, and he takes a humanist approach from a tradition, the Judeo-Christian tradition, that too often has been used as an excuse to oppress others. His work is a marvelous antidote to intolerant "fundamentalisms" and "fundamentalists." But, Daniel, if you would -- please be a bit more mindful of your audience. Making your work more readily accessible would be a very good thing, because the wider world -- the one outside of Berkeley -- greatly needs voices like yours.

Daniel Boyarin turns to the Epistles of Paul as the spiritual autobiography of a first-century Jewish cultural critic. What led Paul in his dramatic conversion to Christianity to such a radical critique of Jewish culture? Paul's famous formulation, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, no male and female in Christ," demonstrates the genius of Christianity: its concern for all people. The genius of Judaism is its validation of genealogy and cultural, ethnic difference. But the evils of these two thought systems are the obverse of their geniuses: Christianity has threatened to coerce universality, while ethnic difference is one of the most troubled issues in modern history. Boyarin posits a "diaspora identity" as a way to negotiate the pitfalls inherent in either position. Jewishness disrupts categories of identity because it is not national, genealogical, or even religious, but all of these, in dialectical tension with one another. It is analogous with gender: gender identity makes us different in some ways but not in others. An exploration of these tensions in the Pauline corpus, argues Boyarin, will lead us to a richer appreciation of our own cultural quandaries as male and female, gay and straight, Jew and Palestinian and as human beings.

From Kirkus SA markedly contemporary study that navigates the New Testament scholar past the perils of Pauline theology. Boyarin (Talmudic Culture/Univ. of Calif., Berkeley; Carnal Israel, not reviewed) attempts to "reclaim Paul as an important Jewish thinker." He goes on to establish this primary apostle as a Hellenized Jew whose Platonic sensibility calls for a universal sameness that negates the divisions separating Jew from Gentile and man from woman. The disembodied spirituality of Platonic dualism allows females (especially virgins) to be equal to men under Christ, and allows an uncircumcised Christian of any gender to "circumcise the foreskin of her [sic] heart" with Hebrew Bible commandments universalized and allegorized. Boyarin does not glibly valorize Paul as a champion of feminism and an opponent of Jewish exclusivist chauvinism. After crediting Paul for being a radical social critic, the author makes clear how the apostle's pre-Marxist universalism too easily slid into violent coercion in the later, blood-soaked chapters of Christian history. Boyarin analyzes the work of many Christian scholars in concluding that Lutheran misinterpretations of Paul allow us to consider the apostle to be far more antagonistic to Jews and Judaism than he really was. The benefit of Boyarin's Jewish defense against hermeneutical Christian anti-Semitism is tempered by his disdain for a Judaic "tendency towards contemptuous neglect for human solidarity" and his anti-Zionism ("modern

Jewish statist nationalism has been...very violent and exclusionary"). Sometimes he confuses Christian "salvation" theology with Jewish belief, and he fails to find any similarity between Pauline Platonism and the allegorical and universal levels of Torah laws. The final chapter digresses to a personal view of the "essentialist/social constructionist dichotomy," but the book does end with ample notes and bibliography. A rewarding read for students of Christian theology willing to be challenged by today's multicultural, poststructuralist, postfeminist scholarship. -- Copyright 1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

From the Inside Flap "A splendid piece of work: learned, witty, wide-ranging in its understanding of religion as a cultural phenomenon, passionate in its concern for the ethical implications of our reading of ancient texts." Richard B. Hays, author of *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* "Boyarin's bracing argument turns us into strangers to ourselves, as the first century comes uncannily close to the twenty-first century. The importance of this stimulating and controversial book lies in promoting an awareness of the possibilities of solidarity, justice, and liberation in the time of the culture wars." Homi K. Bhabha, author of *The Location of Culture* "Brilliant, thought-provoking and outrageous (a compliment in my lexicon). Demonstrates very clearly the merits of a Jewish look at Paul (that is, a Jew looking at Paul in his Jewishness)." Adele Reinhartz, McMaster University "Boyarin has mastered the literature of Paul in amazing detail and devastating understanding. His analytic skills are honed to perfection on the stone of critical theory. As a Jewish reader of a foundational Christian text, he has explained to Christians the power of Paul's thinking for Christians." Burton L. Mack, author of *Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* "This book is a polemic for difference based on genealogical memory as a creative force in the broadest human solidarity. In that sense it is a moral or philosophical tractate, what Boyarin calls cultural criticism, as well as an analysis of Paul's position. I have been greatly informed by a reading of this study." Antoinette Wire, author of *The Corinthian Woman Prophets* "Boyarin weighs in with his usual clat . . . reading the Epistles as if they were contributions to contemporary debates over the issues of feminism, multiculturalism, Zionism, identity politics, and deconstruction, and reading these as if they were germane to an understanding of the Epistles. The book is a tour de force of PoMo criticism, and required reading for anyone interested in the history of religion, Judaism, Christianity, Western culture, 'Orientalism,' identity politics, feminism and the list could go on." Hayden White, author of *Metahistory*