

**Roden, Frederick (ed.). *Jewish/Christian/Queer: Crossroads and Identities.*
*Queer Interventions***

By Sarah Imhoff, Indiana University, USA

1 “The power of ‘queer’ is its breadth,” writes editor Frederick Roden in his introduction to *Jewish/Christian/Queer*. The volume takes advantage of—and pushes the boundaries—of that wide vastness of possibility for the signifier “queer.” Although the disparity of historical and disciplinary approaches of the essays sometimes threatens to pull the collection apart at the seams, its threads never quite break. And in the end, the risk of pulling apart is worth the reward of a better garment. Few scholars will be familiar with all of the material here: it ranges from a textual analysis of Pauline scripture to a psychoanalytic reading of Freud’s relationship to Rome to an architectural and theological argument for the queerness of Queen Anne Churches, to name a few. A queer group indeed. The radical diversity of material, however, undeniably demonstrates the versatility of queer theories. Ultimately, therein lies the lasting argument of the volume: Queer theory can and should touch religious studies scholarship across discipline and material. *Jewish/Christian/Queer* becomes Joseph’s coat: Jewish, Christian, contested, beautiful, and queer.

2 The greatest strength of *Jewish/Christian/Queer* is also its most significant liability: the refusal to confine “queer” to a stable meaning. Over the course of the volume, authors use the term differently, and even within single essays, authors play with the term. Eugene Rogers, Jr. follows Judith Butler’s formulation of queer as an act of continual repetition in order to subvert and displace the terms of a discourse (26-7) and later as an act of querying social roles (31). Caroline Gonda’s literary readings of the “half-Jewish” Pamela Frankau imagine queerness mainly as non-normative sexuality, although she explores it in conjunction with Frankau’s own split national and religious identity. Chris Mounsey uses a metaphor of sex, bodies, and desire to explore the queerness of the architecture in Anglican Queen Anne Churches. Alan Lewis and Goran Stanivukovic discuss Freud’s “queer longing” in terms of both theories of same-sex desire and hermeneutical strategies. Steven Kruger acknowledges that queer can be associated with instability and social resistance but also offers the case of Guillaume de Bourges and medieval “convert orthodoxies” as an argument for recognizing the occasions of strategic stability of queerness. Other contributors, like Bryan Mark Rigg, who concentrates his study on *Mischlinge* (partial Jews) as boundary transgressors, reference definitions of queerness only obliquely.

3 The result is a volume which, taken as a whole, reinscribes much of the “queer *equals* destabilization *equals* resistance to normativity” discourse to which Kruger takes exception. At the meeting places of Jewish and Christian, Roden asserts, “there is rhetorical, theological, and discursive difference. That is a queer crossroads. ... Likewise, the religious/homosexual meeting is always already queer” (4). Although both these locations may be shot through with difference and refusal of certain boundaries, what prevents such a broad sense of queerness from collapsing into difference more generally?

4 Although the term “queer” is a moving target, many of the contributors manage to hit it. Both chapters on early common era religious texts present the construction of Christianity, Judaism, and sexuality in a complex and compelling way. Eugene Rogers, Jr. argues, through a close reading of Paul’s use of “*para phusim*,” that the term constructs both Gentiles and non-normative sex acts as queer. In a rich recuperative textual reading, Rogers goes on to argue that the Holy Spirit also occupies the queer location of *para phusim*. Daniel Boyarin begins by taking the term “queer” in its common connotation of the presentation of gender and sexuality that deviates from dominant norms. But his analysis of the “erotic adventures of Rabbi Meir” suggest another crossing of boundaries: those of genre. Far from occupying a position of a single set of sealed literary conventions, the tales of Rabbi Meir demonstrate their reliance on and responsiveness to Roman novelistic literature and Christian gospels. In his characteristic combination of the charm of rabbinic storytelling and the incisive analysis of a queer theorist, Boyarin argues that the queerness of the tales lies both in Rabbi Meir’s sexual adventures with supernatural beings and the promiscuity of the *aggadot* with respect to genre.

5 The more modern essays also simultaneously deploy and reshape the boundaries of queer theory and religion. Alan Lewis and Goran Stanivukovic’s reading of Freud shows masterful engagement with both psychoanalytic and queer theoretical literature, but also offers an insightful new reading of Freud’s writing about homosexuality through his relationship to the figural Rome. The sword of his early writing cuts both ways, they claim: “on one hand, it is subversive by introducing the unstable split subject; on the other, his ‘authority’ is complicit in the regulation of sexuality” (140).

6 Although it does not have the same kind of thematic continuity of its most significant predecessor in wide-ranging queer theory, *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*,¹ Roden’s volume does provide sustained engagement in questions about the implications of religious conversion and *mischlingkeit* (mixed-ness) for the construction of socially recognizable

¹ Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (Columbia University Press, 2003).

identity. Its insistence on considering Judaism and Christianity as interacting partners, while requiring authors to juggle multiple sets of cultural reference, sets the collection apart from other contemporary publications on queer theory and religion.²

7 As a title in the series called “Queer Interventions,” *Jewish/Christian/Queer* is mostly likely to stage a successful intervention at the level of the scholar. Because of the quality of the individual work of the contributors, most scholars of Christianity or Judaism are likely to recognize the promise of queer theory in their own subfields, while those who work in gender studies will see exempla of the movement beyond an antagonist religion-versus-queerness.

² The bulk of these concern themselves primarily, if not exclusively, with Christian theology. See, for instance, Margaret D. Kamitsuka, *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity* (Fortress Press, 2010); and Gerard Loughlin, *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007); Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2003).