

## Boundary Transgression and the Extreme Point in Acts 10:1–11:18

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THE CONTEXT OF MY REMARKS IS THAT OF NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS and interpretation of texts. Narratology (or better: narratologies) use(s) categories to analyze the ways narratives create meaning. Every story can be told in an infinite number of ways. Raymond Queneau demonstrates this vividly in his 1947 book *Exercices de style*,<sup>1</sup> where he tells a story in ninety-nine variants. Even the New Testament presents some very clear examples of different narrations of the same story. The four Gospels all tell the same story of Jesus of Nazareth, each in its own way. In each of these Gospels the world is depicted somewhat differently, which shows us that narrating is also the projection of a world. The world that is told, that is represented, is always a designed, projected world. The focus of narrative analysis is this depicted world; it attempts to grasp it in its structures and ways of functioning, to describe it and unlock its meaning.

The framework within which my theories operate is classical narratology, whose fundamental works appeared in the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>2</sup> but which has experienced a considerable number of modifications since then. Especially in the last several years, the discussion of theories of narratology has experienced such an interdisciplinary differentiation that it is almost impossible to command the whole field.<sup>3</sup> David Herman writes:

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<sup>1</sup>Translated by Linda Maloney.

Among the many recent articles and books that have promoted a rethinking of classical narratological models are those written from a feminist perspective . . . those written from linguistic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives . . . those written from a cognitive perspective . . . those written from a logico-philosophical perspective based on the concept of possible worlds . . . those written from a rhetorical perspective . . . and those written from a post-modernist perspective that stresses the ludic, nonformalizable, and anti-totalizing forces and effects of narrative. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The works Herman mentions as representing feminist modifications (Susan S. Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*; Kathy Mezeis, *Ambiguous Discourse*; and Robyn R. Warhol, *Gendered Interventions*)<sup>5</sup> are only the tip of the iceberg of feminist narratology. In addition to the great number of studies on narratology that have appeared, one should mention as one of the founding mothers of classical narratology the highly creative Dutch literary scholar Mieke Bal, who has also contributed feminist literary-critical studies of the First Testament.<sup>6</sup>

Out of the plethora of narrative-theoretical questions, I have chosen a central concept, that of “events,” which I would like to explore, presenting first the model suggested by the Estonian literary and cultural semiotician Jurij M. Lotman, then its development by Karl N. Renner, and finally its application to Acts 10:1–11:18.

### JURIJ M. LOTMAN’S THEORY OF BOUNDARY TRANSGRESSION

In the eighth chapter of his principal work, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1977), Lotman developed an independent concept of the event.<sup>7</sup> The previous concept of an event regarded the smallest unit of an action as an event. According to this definition, narrative segments such as “Cornelius had a vision,” “he saw an angel of God,” “it spoke to him,” and so on (Acts 10:3) are events.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Lotman’s concept of event is less attached to the narrative microlevel; instead, he developed criteria for defining as events within the multitude of incidents in a narrative act only those that are of central importance for the happening. The sum of these events, in Lotman’s sense, constitutes the  *sujet*  of a narrative. He is thus working within the dimension of the space of the depicted world, and in this context with the concept of the boundary. The depicted world is, according to Lotman, a semantic space defined by a congeries of semantic features that only this space possesses in

this combination. This reference to features leads to a division of the whole space into disjunctive partial spaces that, in their totality, constitute the static basic order of the narrated world, against whose background action can occur. The central topological feature of a semantic space is its boundary, which also marks off partial spaces and is posited as impassable. The figures in the narrative are connected to particular spaces. An event happens when a figure in the depicted world is displaced across the boundary of a semantic field, that is, a limited space. Then a boundary transgression takes place.

The background for Lotman's theory is his conviction that artistic works—and in this sense literary texts are no different from pictures, buildings, or films—are secondary, model-building systems, and that as semiotic systems they project a specific view of the world. These designs for the world, according to Lotman, follow the iconic principle—that “in the majority of cases visible spatial objects serve as the denotata of verbal signs. . . .”<sup>9</sup> In light of this significance of spatial categories in modeling the world, Lotman has shown that spaces in literary texts therefore in many ways assume semantic functions beyond their mere task of forming a backdrop for the actions of the figures. Lotman formulates:

While serving as the principle of organization and disposition of the personae within the artistic continuum, the structure of the *topos* emerges as the language for expressing other, non-spatial relations in the text. This determines the special modeling role of space within a text.<sup>10</sup>

This point of view can be illustrated also by the fact that nonspatial matters are frequently expressed through spatial metaphors, for example, “left” and “right” for political positions, or “above” and “below” for social relationships.

Lotman develops his concept of event against this background, and in this context he unfolds his theory of the transgression of boundaries. It implies a two-step analysis. First the depicted world is to be conceived at the textual level, still *sujet*-less, that is, eventless. The depicted space is grasped and defined in terms of a group of features. In the process of analysis, boundaries become perceptible, and those boundaries divide the space into disjunctive partial spaces. The boundaries are characterized by their impassability. The sum of the partial spaces and their semantics constitute the static fundamental order of the depicted world in which the action takes place. In the process of analysis, each element of the text (both objects and figures) must be assigned to a semantic space. Clues for the definition of the “semantic space” of the topological system are often found in the topographical, that is, the geographical relationships within a text. However, topography is not always

the basis for the topology. Topology is a more abstract reality in comparison to topography and may be inferred from axes such as vertical versus horizontal, or oppositions such as inner and outer, open and closed, alone or together, and so on.

In a second step, our analysis should be directed to the movements of figures within the depicted world and its order, that is, the dynamic narrative action in the “eventfull” (*sujet-full*) layer of the text. As soon as a figure moves across a boundary within the fundamental order of the depicted world and its borders, the narrative becomes eventfull (*sujet-full*). An event is thus always an offense against the norms of the order of the depicted world in which boundaries are posited as impassable.

We may in principle distinguish two groups of event types: restitutive and revolutionary transgressions of boundaries. Restitutive transgression can take the following forms:

1. *Retraction of the transgression: return to the initial space.* A figure moves into the counterspace, thus damaging the existing order, and then returns to the space from which it departed. There is a brief “disturbance of the balance”<sup>11</sup> at the moment when the heroine is in the counterspace, but she returns to her point of departure and thus the previous balance, the given order of the spaces, is restored. This can be illustrated by an advertising spot for so-called K heels:

She’s quitting her job. The secretary marches angrily through the office door, slaps her letter against her ex-boss’s tie, and leaves. Then it happens: the heel of her shoe gets caught in the doorsill. Snide grins. But the heel holds solid, her departure is saved, and the heroine achieves an especially effective exit.<sup>12</sup>

The heroine enters the counterspace, the office of her former boss, and disturbs the order of the space. The counterspace bears multiple markers: the protagonist storms through a door into the office without knocking and slaps her letter of resignation on her ex-boss’s chest. Moreover, in doing this she stands out as a woman in a world in which men are the bosses. She massively disrupts the order of the counterspace, but after doing so she returns to her previous space. The order of the counterspace was damaged, but it, together with that of the initial space, is restored.

2. The second variant of the restitutive type is *departure into a new space*; that is, the hero accepts the condition of the space he has entered. The order of the previous space is replaced by that of the new space. Here is an example from an advertising spot for a Panasonic camera:

Father comes home drunk from a business dinner. His family is waiting for him at home. Mother films his entrance with their new Panasonic video camera. Suddenly, he is sober.<sup>13</sup>

Here the door of the apartment is the boundary between business and family. There are different orders in the two spaces. With the change of space the man's behavior suddenly changes; he accommodates himself to the norms of the family. The damage to order is repaired and order is restored.

3. In contrast to restitutive transgression of boundaries, revolutionary transgression is differently shaped. There is a *transformation of order or an elimination of order or destruction of space*: These variants of boundary transgression are also called *meta-events*.

The order of semantic spaces is changed by this kind of boundary transgression, and the basic order of the depicted world is transformed. Boundaries shift, are removed, constitute themselves anew. There is no longer any conflict between the heroine and the semantic space. The following advertising spot for adhesive stickers may illustrate this:

A teacher, of the old-maid type, is visiting a museum with her class, and has to pass a roomful of nudes. She makes the class wait until she has applied black adhesive strips to all the indecent spots. The boys tumble through the room like a bunch of dummies, but two smart girls drop out of the group and take a closer look at the interesting nudes—which is all the easier because taking off the stickers is as easy as putting them on.<sup>14</sup>

Here the protagonists rearrange the order in the space, and doubly so. The teacher changes the order by covering particular parts of the nudes. The young women alter that order by taking off the stickers, but they are also able to put them back on. The order of the space is altered and reconstituted in a new way.

### KARL NIKOLAUS RENNER'S RULE OF THE EXTREME POINT

Karl Nikolaus Renner has suggested an expansion of Lotman's theory of transgression of boundaries: the rule of the *extreme point*.<sup>15</sup> He thus attempts to model the internal structure of spaces and the movements of the figures within limited spaces, points neglected by Lotman.

Renner's rule of the extreme point begins with the concept that semantic spaces are ordered according to internal structure and frequently according to hierarchical elements, that is, extreme points. This last can be a topographical center or the summit of a mountain, the bow of the Titanic or political and social structures such as the office of a president or the position of the *paterfamilias*. According to Renner, it is striking that the figures do not wander aimlessly within their limited spaces; instead, their movements are frequently ordered toward such extreme points. Aiming at the extreme point can fulfill two functions: arrival at the extreme point becomes either a turning point or the end point of the event.

Extreme points become turning points when the directions of movement change and there is either return to the initial space or a transformation of order. In the example of the "K" heels, we have a case in which the extreme point, the boss's desk against the back wall of the office (where, in addition, the hierarchically topmost figure in the space is located) is the turning point of the movements of the secretary who is quitting; she then returns to the space from which she departed.

Extreme points become end points when the movements of the figures stop there. An advertising spot for fireplaces may serve as an example:

A fireplace with fire burning, an empty room. The door opens and, one after another, a dog, a cat, and a mouse enter and settle down peacefully in front of the cozy fire without attacking each other. That is how pleasant the atmosphere of a real fireplace is.<sup>16</sup>

The structure of the space is presented in such a way that the fireplace is the focus, the center of the room. The animals' route leads to the fireplace, which here constitutes an extreme point, and there it ends. Thus, in every respect the extreme point is the end point of their movements—for the animals who enter this peaceful space behave differently than expected, namely, contrary to their nature, equally peaceful. They adopt the condition of this peaceful space. Renner also calls the extreme point the *focus of the event*.

Thus, Renner's reception of Lotman's theory of transgression of boundaries results in a modification: he reformulates and expands Lotman's concept of event as the disturbance of an order: an event happens when the boundaries (Lotman) and thus the order (Renner) of the depicted world are disturbed. From the side of the protagonists this leads to a return to the initial space or to acceptance of the order of the counterspace or—and then it is a *meta-event*—to the transformation of the order of the depicted world.

**BOUNDARY TRANSGRESSION  
AND THE EXTREME POINT IN ACTS 10:1–11:18**

The story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18)<sup>17</sup> can be briefly sketched. It is told in four scenes taking place on four days within an indeterminate period of time, possibly one to two weeks:<sup>18</sup>

*First Scene (Acts 10:1–8):* At the ninth hour the centurion Cornelius has a vision in his house in Caesarea and is instructed by an angel to have Peter brought from Joppa (10:1–6). He sends three of his people to Joppa (10:7–8).

*Second Scene (Acts 10:9–23a):* The next day, at the sixth hour, Peter goes up to the roof of the house of Simon the tanner in Joppa; there, in ecstasy, he sees heaven opened and three times a vessel descending from heaven filled with the greatest variety of animals. A voice instructs Peter to kill and eat them, something he emphatically refuses to do. At the same time Cornelius's envoys arrive, and after they have reported Cornelius's vision, they are received by Peter into the tanner's house.

*Third Scene (Acts 10:23b–48):* Peter's departure on the next day, together with brothers and sisters from Joppa and Cornelius's envoys (10:23b) is very compactly summarized. The scene itself begins—on the fourth day, according to narrative time—with the arrival of Peter and his company at Cornelius's house in Caesarea. The house is already filled with Cornelius's family and close friends (10:24, 27, 44). When Peter is about to enter, Cornelius throws himself at his feet; Peter rejects this (10:25–26). Only after this encounter does Peter enter the house, justifying this step (which is not permitted to him as a Jew) by a summary reference to his vision (10:27–29). Then Cornelius tells his vision (10:30–33). A speech by Peter follows (10:34–43). At the same moment, the Holy Spirit descends on all the hearers and is poured out upon them (10:44–46). Peter decides to baptize these Gentiles, who are filled with the Holy Spirit (10:47–48). He is entreated to remain a few days in Cornelius's house (10:48).

*Fourth Scene (Acts 11:1–18):* Days later. In a summary note it is reported that the apostles and believers in Jerusalem learn that the Gentiles, too, have accepted the word of God (11:1). When Peter comes to Jerusalem, he is accused of having entered the house of non-Jews and eaten with them (11:2–3). Peter gives an account of the events in Joppa and Caesarea (11:4–

17). His report closes with a summary note telling of the agreement of the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (11:18).

The world depicted in this narrative sequence is characterized by two striking axes, vertical and horizontal. On the horizontal axis three cities are particularly significant: Caesarea, Joppa, and Jerusalem. The figures in the narrative are oriented to these cities, and they acquire significance through particular groups of features.

Caesarea is a city that, as its name already indicates, was founded in honor of the Roman emperor. (It was built under Herod the Great.) It was thus part of the pagan *Imperium Romanum* and since 6 C.E. had been the seat of the Roman procurator. Its belonging to the *Imperium Romanum* is emphasized also by the characterization of Cornelius as a centurion. Cornelius is introduced as centurion of the Italian cohort, which at the same time semanticizes the city as a base for Roman troops. It was not such a base at the time of the narrative, however, although it may have been one beginning in 69 C.E.<sup>19</sup> Cornelius, as his extended Latin name tells us, is a Roman and, as a Roman officer, a member of a Gentile nation. These features are all in contrast to Judaism, yet he is portrayed sympathetically by the narrator—from a Jewish perspective—as devout and generous toward the people of God, that is, as a sympathizer of the Jewish faith and people (10:2, 4, 22, 31).<sup>20</sup> However, that does not alter Cornelius's life context, which stands in opposition to Judaism, something that is further underscored by the geopolitical situation of Caesarea in Samaria.

Joppa, in contrast, was a Jewish port city in Judea after 145 B.C.E. (1 Macc 12:33; 13:11) and thus constitutes a geopolitical opposition to Caesarea. Moreover, in 66 C.E. Joppa was one of the centers of the Jewish revolt against the Roman occupation. Joppa thus stands in sharp contrast to Roman Caesarea and the pagan *Imperium Romanum*.<sup>21</sup>

When Peter is called to Joppa, there is already a group of Jews in the city who believe in Christ, centered on the disciple Tabitha, a Jewish woman emphatically identified as having devoted herself to the poor (9:36; cf. 9:39). Her charitable work is described in the same vocabulary that will later be used to characterize Cornelius (9:36; 10:2). Giving alms is to be understood in Tabitha's case, as in that of Cornelius, in the larger context of the exercise of justice.<sup>22</sup> Peter's raising of Tabitha from death (9:36–41) brings many more people to the faith, as is summarily told in 9:42. Thus, Joppa is the semantic place of Jews who believe in Christ and exercise justice. Peter is staying there in the house of Simon the tanner.



The third geographical pillar of the narrative is Jerusalem. Like Joppa, Jerusalem is a Jewish city; moreover, it is the center of Judaism and at the same time the place of the culmination of the events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth and the point of departure for the witness given by Jesus' disciples (Acts 1:8). Acts tells how the group of Jesus' apostles is reconstituted in Jerusalem with the election of Matthias; here all his disciples receive the Holy Spirit and begin to spread the message about Jesus as the Christ (Acts 2ff.). In Jerusalem, since Jesus' ascension, what may be called the central office of Christian believers has existed; here decisions are made about the norms for the group, its organization, and so on (see Acts 5; 6; 15). It is thus only natural that Peter should go up to Jerusalem to give a report on the events in Caesarea (11:1–18). In accordance with the geographical and geopolitical order, the depicted world is divided into the space of the Jews, the Jews who believe in Christ in Joppa and Jerusalem, and the (different) Gentiles in Caesarea and in the house of Cornelius. With regard to the much-discussed question of the relationship between Jews and Christians in Acts,<sup>23</sup> it is important for this narrative sequence that a boundary cannot here be determined between Jews and Jews who believe in Christ. The boundary is clearly laid between Jews and Gentiles.

Within this triangle of cities, the house of the Gentile Cornelius constitutes the focal point of the event. Peter and his company, all figures from the Jewish initial space, enter the counterspace of Caesarea (*eisēlthen eis tēn kaisareian*) (10:24). There they find the house of Cornelius. At this point there is a scenic intermezzo that prepares for Peter's monumental crossover. As the Jew Peter is about to enter the house of a Gentile (*hōs de egeneto tou eisēlthein ton Petron*) (10:25), Cornelius meets him and throws himself at Peter's feet. At the doorstep of the house of the pagan Cornelius, the Jew Peter is venerated by Cornelius as if he were a god. Peter raises Cornelius up and explicitly rejects this veneration by emphasizing that he is only a human being. Only after this short episode does Peter finally enter (*eisēlthen*) the house (10:27). Here Cornelius has gathered his relatives and closest friends, which is clearly emphasized (10:24, 27). Those assembled in Cornelius's house are members of Cornelius's own nation and can be interpreted, *pars pro toto*, as non-Jewish people: Gentiles. Thus the house of Cornelius becomes the extreme point of Caesarea, which is semanticized as Roman and Gentile. The transgression of the impermeable boundary of the space takes place as the Jew Peter enters the house of the Gentile Cornelius—and Peter is not alone. The Jewish believers in Christ from Joppa are with him; they cross the boundary with him and later serve as witnesses in Jerusalem.

The size of the groups associated with the conversion of the Roman Cornelius distinguishes this narrative from the first story of the conversion of a Gentile in Acts 8. There the God-fearing court official from Ethiopia, while traveling through Samaria, is converted and baptized by the evangelist Philip (Acts 8:26–39). Philip and the Ethiopian are alone on the road in a lonely place (this is emphasized; see Acts 8:26). In contrast, Cornelius's conversion by Peter affects a large group of people and is narrated as a boundary transgression by Peter. It is explicitly so characterized by Peter when he says: "You yourselves know that it is unlawful (*athemiton estin*) for a Jew (*andri ioudaiō*) to associate with (*kollasthai*) or to visit (*proserchesthai*) a foreigner (*allophylo*); but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean (*koinon ē akatharton*)" (10:28).

Thus is the norm formulated that will be violated by Peter's crossing of the boundary. Entering the house of a foreigner, that is, a member of a foreign nation, is excluded by this norm as something forbidden to Jews. This rigid norm<sup>24</sup> is sharpened by the next statement, which describes foreign people, in opposition to Jews, as common or unclean. Within the narrative sequence this ordering of the depicted world in stark contrasts is repeatedly brought to the fore, varied, and ultimately transformed.

In Peter's vision he is called upon to slaughter and eat unclean animals, something that as a Jew he must resolutely refuse to do, as demanded by the order of the depicted world (10:13–15). This order, based on the opposition between clean and unclean, is challenged by the scene in Peter's vision, but it remains intact because Peter refuses to establish the new order that is demanded of him. But this changes in the subsequent scene: when Peter enters the house of the Gentile Cornelius, who is regarded as unclean, the order of things whereby Jews are to avoid what is unclean is massively attacked. Peter's transgression of this boundary accomplishes a transformation of the order of the depicted world when he, as a Jew, accepts "that I should not call anyone profane or unclean (*koinon ē akatharton*)" (10:28).

In the fourth scene in Jerusalem, then, it is not the news that the Gentiles have also accepted the word of God that causes outrage. What awakens resistance is Peter's transgression of boundaries, his entry into the house of a non-Jew. That is the real offense against order that is the subject of controversy. It is addressed in two different ways. Peter is reproached, first, because he, a Jew, entered the house of uncircumcised men (*eisēlthes pros andras akrobystian echontas*) and, second, because he ate with them (*synephages autois*) (11:3). With this the offense against norms that Peter himself spoke of in Cornelius's house (10:28) is repeated, with variation. The repetition emphasizes that

Peter's boundary transgression—his entry, as a Jew, into the house of non-Jews and his eating with them—is the *meta-event* in this narrative sequence. The consequence of this boundary transgression is a transformation of the order of the depicted world: from now on, for Jews who believe in Christ, the boundary between what is Jewish and the Gentiles, who until this point have been regarded as unclean, has been removed. The sharply drawn parallel narrative of the conversion and baptism of Lydia, the God-fearing dealer of purple goods, and the matter-of-fact entry and exit of Paul and his companions into and out of her house is an example of this fact (Acts 16:13–15, 40).

The transformation of the order of things as presented in Acts 10:1–11:18 contains an additional refinement. In a further presentation, in Peter's speech in Cornelius's house, told from Peter's perspective, we read at the very beginning (10:34–35): "I truly understand that God shows no partiality (*prosōpolēptēs*), but in every nation (*en panti ethnei*) anyone who fears God (*phoboumenos auton*) and does what is right (*ergazomenos dikaiosynēn*) is acceptable to God" (10:34–35). Thus a shift has occurred. In the transformed order the fundamental difference between the people of Israel and the other nations has been removed; what counts in the new order is not belonging to this or that nation, but fear of God and righteous action. Against this background it is clear that the repeated description of Cornelius as devout, God-fearing, and a person who is generous in giving alms (10:1–2, 4, 22, 31) is not mere ornamentation. Within this narrative sequence the character of Cornelius as a God-fearing and generous Gentile is a precondition for his vision. The narrator causes the angel himself to express this causality (10:4), and it is also presented in Peter's speech (10:35).

In addition to this horizontal axis, the vertical axis of the narrative sequence is also sharply delineated. It presents the opposition between heaven and earth, the divine and human spheres. Figures and objects from heaven cross the boundary between heaven and earth, the human realm. This is explicitly the case on three occasions. In the first scene, the angel's appearance in Cornelius's house represents a first boundary transgression between heaven and earth and constitutes an *event* in Lotman's sense. Angels are beings that belong to the heavens, and this angel is additionally characterized in the narrator's discourse as an angel of God (10:3) and thus unmistakably belonging to God's space. The case of the second boundary crossing between heaven and earth, the descent of the "sheet" in Peter's vision (10:11) is analogous. It is accompanied by a massive violation of order. The Jew Peter, who lives

according to Torah, is asked to slaughter and eat unclean animals. This boundary transgression also has event character. Both transgressions of boundary are, however, retracted, because the figure (angel) and object (sheet) return to the place from which they came. It is said of the angel that Cornelius sees him enter (*eiselthonta pros auton*) (10:3), but he also departs (*apēlthen ho angelos*) (10:7). Of the “sheet” it is said that Peter sees the heaven opened (*ton ouranon aneōgmenon*), and this container descending to earth (*kai katabainon skeuos ti hōs othonēn megalēn tessarsin archais kathiemēnon epi tēs gēs*) (10:11), and that this happened three times. But this vessel is also taken up again into heaven (*anelēmphthē to skeuos eis ton ouranon*) (10:16). As events that emphasize the axis heaven–earth, these happenings function here as prelude. They lead to the *meta-event* and lend it divine authorization.

It is different with the descent of the Spirit in the third scene. The Spirit is also associated with the heavenly world through the epithet “holy.” In the third scene, the Spirit descends on the hearers (*epepesen to pneuma to hagion epi pantas tous akouontas ton logon*) (10:44), and soon afterward the Holy Spirit is poured out even upon the Gentiles (*epi ta ethnē hē dōrea tou pneumatōs tou hagiou ekkechytai*) (10:45). Nothing is said about a return to the place of origin. The descent of the Spirit can thus be interpreted as the divine sealing of Peter’s boundary transgression and thus as a way of expressing the transformation of the order of things. The order of the Christ group, as it had been analogously constituted through the event of Pentecost (Acts 2), is now established among the Gentiles. In the Peter–Cornelius sequence only certain paradigmatic bits and pieces are narrated: namely, the ability to speak in tongues and to praise God (*lalountōn glōssais kai megalymontōn ton theon*) (10:46). Reception of baptism is proleptically referred to (10:48). With the outpouring of the Spirit the *meta-event* of Peter’s boundary transgression and the transformation of the order of things that occurs as a result, which is told as something coming from heaven and thus from God (and prepared for by Peter’s vision), is now sanctioned on that basis.<sup>25</sup>

The result to be affirmed is that an analysis of the text in terms of Lotman’s theory of boundary transgression puts us in a position to explicate the central event in the narrative sequence in a methodical manner. In this narrative that event is not, as appears at first glance, the conversion of Cornelius but rather the “conversion” of Peter. His movement across the boundary of the counter-space of the Gentiles, coded as forbidden, is the central event in this narrative sequence; and staying in the house of a non-Jewish person is the turning

point for Peter the Jew. He returns to the center of his Jewish place of origin and transforms its order. The boundary between the place of origin (the people of God) and the counterspace (the Gentiles) has become permeable. A few verses later in the narrative, the group-name “Christians” is introduced (Acts 11:26). The Jewish group of “Christians” forms within Judaism—certainly not outside of it<sup>26</sup>—and acquires a profile. This ultimately leads to conflict within the Jewish people, with groups that cannot accept this transformation of order. But that is another story.



Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s vita is also characterized by the crossing and transgression of boundaries. She crossed the boundaries of her place of origin, Europe, and she has transgressed boundaries as a Roman Catholic woman. She has established herself as a Catholic exegete in North American universities, which when she began her work were still primarily dominated by men. But she did not lose herself in this male-dominated counterspace. Elisabeth’s boundary transgression is, instead, a *meta-event*. It led to a transformation of the order of things, an enormously effective transformation of the order of the space of the university and of the church. She has sustained women’s joy in theology and given them self-confidence; she has encouraged both women and men to lift up their voices and not allow themselves to be silenced. For this I, together with many others, owe her immense gratitude.

#### NOTES

1. Paris: Gallimard, 36th ed., 1959.

2. These include Gérard Genette, *Figures III (Poétiques)* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972; partial English translation, *Narrative Discourse* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980]); idem, *Nouveau Discours du Récit (Poétique)* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983); Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. C. van Boheemen (2nd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin/New York/Amsterdam: Mouton, 1982); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London/New York: Routledge, 1983).

3. See the review of research by Ansgar von Nünning, "Towards a Cultural and Historical Narratology: A Survey of Diachronic Approaches, Concepts, and Research Projects," in *Anglistentag 1999 Mainz: Proceedings of the Conference of the German Association of University Teachers of English 21*, ed. B. Reitz and S. Rieuwerts (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2000), 345–73.

4. David Herman, "Introduction," in *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, ed. David Herman, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 27.

5. Susan S. Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Robyn R. Warhol, *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

6. To mention only Mieke Bal's most important works: *Narratology; Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987); *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Siser's Death*, trans. M. Gumpert (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology*, ed. David Jobling (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1991).

7. Jurij M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. from the Russian by Ronald Vroon, Michigan Slavic Contributions 7 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 209–84. His theory of boundary transgression was developed and modified by Karl N. Renner, *Der Findling: Eine Erzählung von Heinrich von Kleist und ein Film von George Moore: Prinzipien einer adäquaten Wiedergabe narrativer Strukturen*, Münchner Germanistische Beiträge 31 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1983). For an example of its application to drama, see Hans Krahl, "Gelöste Bindungen/bedingte Lösungen": *Untersuchungen zum Drama im ersten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Passau: Wissenschaftsverlag Rothe, 1996), 90–170, 274–305; idem, "'Zeichen, die wir deuten müßten': Raumentwurf, Zeiterfahrung und Selbstfindung in Hans Henny Jahns *Der staubige Regenbogen* (1959)," in *Forum Homosexualität und Literatur* 39 (2001): 5–25; and on films and narrative texts, see idem, *Die Narration vom Ende: Weltuntergangsszenarien in Literatur und Film nach 1945*, Habilitationsschrift am Institut für Literaturwissenschaft in Kiel 2000, forthcoming.

8. See, e.g., the influential definition by the Russian formalist Boris Tomashevski, *Theorie der Literatur: Poetik*, trans. U. Werner from the text of the 6th ed. [Moscow/Leningrad, 1931], edited and introduced by K.-D. Seeman (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1985), 211ff.

9. Lotman continues: "We might perform a sort of mental experiment: let us imagine some extremely generalized concept, some sort of all, totally lacking concrete attributes, and try to determine its features for ourselves. It will not be difficult to

ascertain that for the majority of people these features will have a spatial character; 'boundlessness' (i.e. relation to the purely spatial category of boundary; in addition the word 'boundlessness' in the everyday meaning it has for most people, is merely a synonym for something very large, an enormous expanse of something), the ability to have parts. The very concept of universality, as a number of experiments have shown, has an abstract spatial character for most people" (*Structure*, 217).

10. *Ibid.*, 231–32.

11. Tzvetan Todorov describes the narrative structure of a story as a succession of "balance–disturbance of the balance–restored, new balance" ("Grammatik und Erzählgrammatik," in *Poetik der Prosa*, *Ars poetica*, Studien 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972), 115–25, esp. 117, 124.

12. Karl N. Renner, "Räume–Grenzen–Handlungen: Die Grenzüberschreitungs-theorie als Analyseinstrument von Texten und Filmen" (paper presented at the Ringvorlesung "Grenzen erfahren . . .," Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, 14 December 1998), 1–21, here 11 <<http://www.journalistik.uni-mainz.de/grenz.htm>>.

13. *Ibid.*, 12.

14. *Ibid.*

15. For this and what follows, see Karl N. Renner, "Zu den Brennpunkten des Geschehens: Erweiterung der Grenzüberschreitungstheorie: Die Extrempunktregel," *diskurs film: Münchner Beiträge zur Filmphilologie* 1 (1986): 115–30; *idem*, "Räume–Grenzen–Handlungen" (see n. 12 above).

16. Renner, "Räume–Grenzen," 15.

17. The following literary-critical studies of Acts 10:1–11:18, narratological in the broadest sense, but with very different emphases, have been published in *Recherches de science religieuse* 58 (1970): Roland Barthes, "L'analyse structurale du récit: A propos d'Acts X–XI" (pp. 17–37); Louis Marin, "Essai d'analyse structurale d'Actes 10,1–11,18" (pp. 39–61); Edgar Haulotte, "Fondation d'une Communauté de Type Universal: Actes 10,1–11,18" (pp. 63–100); see also Claude Chabrol, "Analyse du 'texte' de la Passion," in *Languages: Sémiotique Narrative: Récits Bibliques*, ed. C. Chabrol and L. Marin (Paris: Didier, 1971), 75–96; Joseph Courtes, "Actes 10, 1–11, 18 comme système de représentations mythiques," in *Exégèse et Herméneutique*, ed. X. Léon Dufour (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), 205–11; Robert W. Funk, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1988), 150–56 *passim*; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 of *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 128–45; Ronald D. Witherup, "Cornelius Over and Over and Over Again: 'Functional Redundancy' in the Acts of the Apostles," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 (1993): 45–66; William S. Kurz, "Effects of Variant Narrators in Acts 10–11," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 570–86; Günter Wasserberg, *Aus Israels Mitte–Heil für die Welt: Eine narrativ-exegetische Studie zur Theologie des Lukas*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 92 (Berlin/New York: Walter de

Gruyter, 1998), 273–305; Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism*, trans. John Bowden (London: S.C.M. Press, 1999, 80 passim).

18. In my methodological approach, the question of the historical background of the narrative sequence is not vital; the historicity of the circumstances described is neither verified nor questioned. That question simply does not occur here; a different methodology would be required to address it. The following analysis is directed primarily to the narrated time, the narrated space, and the narrated figures, and analyzes what, within this projected world, is “eventful” in Lotman’s sense. At certain points it seems to me worthwhile to refer to historical contexts, and here especially to additional literature, in order to indicate how the manner of narrating has sharply reduced the historical complexity.

19. See Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Übersetzt und erklärt, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 3* (17th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 303.

20. For the “God-fearers” in Acts, see most recently the discussion in Wasserberg, *Israels Mitte*, 44ff.; on the whole problem of a precise definition of this group, see Bernd Wander, *Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten: Studien zum heidnischen Umfeld von Diasporasynagogen*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1998).

21. See Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist-Liberation Perspective*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 33–34.

22. See below, and extensively on this subject Richter Reimer, *Women in Acts*, 36–41; on Tabitha, see especially the whole of ch. 2, “The Miraculous Story of the Disciple Tabitha (9:36–43)” (pp. 31–69).

23. See most recently Matthias Blum, “Antijudaismus im lukanischen Doppelwerk?” in “Nun steht aber diese Sache im Evangelium . . .”: *Zur Frage nach den Anfängen des christlichen Antijudaismus*, ed. Rainer Kampling (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999), 107–49.

24. For the complexity of Jewish life in the first half of the first century in Palestine, see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, 4 vols., rev. and ed. by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Maxwell Black (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973–1987); as well as Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

25. The strongly developed vertical axis is also emphasized within the human sphere by the opposition between above and below. It is seen in Peter’s going up to the roof of the house of Simon the tanner in order to pray, that is, in order to be closer to the sphere of heaven, which is semanticized as divine (*anebē Petros epi to dōma*) (10:9), or also in Cornelius’s *proskynēsis*, when he throws himself at Peter’s feet and



thus shows him the honor that belongs to God (10:25). Peter, who raises Cornelius to his feet (*ēgeiren auton*) (10:26), interprets this downward movement explicitly as divine worship, which he decisively rejects (*anastēthi; kai egō autos anthrōpos eimi*) (10:26). Finally, Peter goes up (*anebē*) to Jerusalem, the city of God and of Judaism, in order to have the transformation of the order of things sanctioned there.

26. The much-disputed question of the relationship between Jews and Christians in Acts can be answered unequivocally for Acts 10:1–11:18: believers in Christ belong absolutely and entirely to Judaism (for this problem, see also n. 23 above).