



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

Foreword to the Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference, Issue 4 (2016)

Rosenwein, Barbara

Citation

Rosenwein, B. (2016). Foreword to the Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference, Issue 4 (2016). Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/38535>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/38535>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

FOREWORD

BREAKING THE RULES!

If we think about breaking the rules in the abstract, the topic seems straightforward. There are rules, written or unwritten. Some people break those rules. They have their reasons, and we can speculate about them. They are rewarded, or punished, or experience no consequences; we can trace these various results and talk about why they are the case.

But as soon as we try to apply these observations to particular cases, the issue suddenly becomes quite murky. Whose rules are broken when people break the rules? And are they breaking all rules in so doing? Even deviants, as sociologist Howard Becker has argued, create their own sorts of rules. Textual materials are said to follow rules of genre and grammar. But that means that poetry must break the rules of prose and that works in Korean must violate the grammar of writings in English. Adhering to one set of rules means breaking others.

The LUCAS Graduate Conference of 2015 brought together papers of remarkable variety, all treating the topic of transgression in one way or another. The texts taken up ranged from the Bible to modern novels. In the end, the theme that united them was less the crossing of boundaries

than the extraordinary variety of ways that human beings found to assert themselves with and against rules – and how they often associated with others in doing so.

One might consider the original Judeo-Christian transgressor to be Eve in the Garden of Eden. She knew God’s prohibition not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil lest she die. Indeed, she repeated God’s very words to the serpent. But she had good reasons to violate those words. First, the serpent assured her that she would not die. Second, she “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6). She broke God’s law not to transgress *per se*, but rather because she saw the benefits outweighing the drawbacks: she would probably not die (and we later learn that the serpent was not entirely wrong about that), and she would gain in nourishment, in pleasure, and in wisdom. Moreover, she knew that she was not alone; she immediately recruited her husband. Once she did so, you might say that there were two rule breakers; three if we count the serpent. But another way to view the matter is that these two (or three) were making their own rules. Those rules might roughly be summed up thus: eat food that is good; take pleasure in delights of the senses; and pursue wisdom at every opportunity.

Augustine recognized this new set of rules as original sin. Today we have largely adopted them as our own. But we may also recognize another

implication: transgression of one set of rules brings with it another set. Had Adam refused to eat, he would have violated Eve's new rules even as he adhered to God's. It is, then, I submit, impossible to break all rules. Transgression itself becomes so rule bound that the next movement needs to transgress it. The attempts to do so are, as the LUCAS Graduate Conference of 2015 shows, endlessly fascinating.



Barbara Rosenwein
Loyola University Chicago