BOOK REVIEW

Bruce W. Longenecker, *Rhetoric at the Boundaries: The Art and Theology of New Testament Chain-Link Transitions* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005). x + 305 pp. Hdbk. US$39.95.

The application of ancient rhetorical theory to the New Testament comes in two forms. Some incorporate ancient rhetoric in order to explain macro-structural phenomena, attempting to establish a direct connection between the categories found in the ancient handbooks and the structure of New Testament texts (esp. epistles), while others employ rhetorical terminology with reference to individual literary features such as chiasmus, inclusio, enthymeme, and so on. *Rhetoric at the Boundaries* makes a significant contribution to the second discussion.

Longenecker is to be applauded for his detailed attention to secondary literature and for the large amount of material he is able to cover in a relatively small amount space. He offers a helpful survey of a wide assortment of ancient literary devices that are similar, yet distinct, from his own proposal while at the same time situating his study within the context of recent research on transitional devices in the New Testament. The book is well-written and carefully researched and deserves considerable attention from those interested in the structure of the New Testament at any level—rhetorical, literary, or linguistic.

The central thesis of *Rhetoric at the Boundaries* is that a previously unexplored transitional device, the chain-link interlock, has significant structural, compositional-historical, and theological implications for the study of the New Testament. In its purest form, this construction involves an A–b–a–B pattern with 'upper-case letters representing the major portion of a text unit and lower-case letters representing the overlap that is sandwiched on the boundaries of the text units' (p. 18). The 'b' elements of the transition have an anticipatory or foreshadowing function while 'a' elements provide retrospective material. In order to

establish the literary currency of this pattern in the ancient world, Longenecker draws from a triangulation of evidence involving (1) theoretical support from ancient rhetorical theorists, (2) non-New Testament texts in antiquity (mostly deutero-canonical and Old Testament material) and (3) fourteen examples drawn from six different New Testament books.

Longenecker argues that solid theoretical support for the chain-link interlock can be found in the works of Lucian of Samosata, well known for his work on Greek historiography, and Quintilian, the prominent rhetorician. I am not as convinced, however. The passage he cites from Lucian comes from section 55 of his *How to Write History* (p. 12) and follows Fowler and Fowlers' translation: 'though all parts must be independently perfected, when the first is complete the second will be brought into essential connection with it, and attached like one link of a chain to another; there must be no possibility of separating them; no mere bundle of parallel threads; the first is not simply to be next to the second, but part of it, their extremities intermingling'. Is Lucian suggesting the type of 'A–b–a–B' pattern that Longenecker proposes or is he merely stating that it is essential that text units maintain cohesion through transitional boundaries? As Longenecker recognizes, the employment of the chain metaphor is unclear. Nevertheless, he proposes that Lucian's point is that 'the boundary between two text units should be free from tectonic compression and bunching on the one hand (i.e. "humps") and from tectonic spread and separation on the other hand (i.e. "hollows")' (p. 12). If this is the meaning, then avoidance of these situations would cause a thematic overlap of material at transitions from one unit to another in the form of a chain-link interlock construction. Yet this reading seems hard to maintain and depends on many assumptions that are not explicit in the text. It seems more likely that Lucian employs the chain terminology to indicate the importance of linguistic cohesion between units so that there is a clear unity within the text, without the possibility of separation or textual independence. There is more to be said for Lucian's comment that units are 'to mix at the boundaries', but even here there is no specification as to the nature of this overlap and it is not evident that Lucian has a particular transitional device in mind. The connection intended could be as subtle as an inferential conjunction or as overt as an inverted hinge clause/section. I can certainly see Longenecker's point here and it seems clear that Lucian did indeed see the importance of maintaining cohesion from

unit to unit, but whether this textual continuity is gained from an interlocking A–b–a–B transitional device is, from my perspective, still open to question.

Quintilian apparently had awareness of the chain-link interlock as well (p. 13). In 9.4.129 of *Institutio oratoria* he states that orations should be 'characterized by a certain continuity of motion and connection of style'. 'All of its members', he insists, 'are to be closely linked together, while the fluidity of its style gives it great variety of movement; we may compare its motion to that of people who link hands to steady their steps, and lend each other mutual support'. Whereas the passage from Lucian may contain hints of the chain-link interlock, this passage from Quintilian merely provides an analogy that emphasizes the importance of fluid progression and continuity within the movements of an oration. It seems hard to derive from this passage, especially considering the context, a more specialized theoretical statement about an ancient transitional device.

Given that mention of the chain-link interlock is only found in Lucian's work on historiography (which, of course, was not a rhetorical handbook) and Quintilian, Longenecker confesses that the 'evidence provided by ancient rhetoricians on the matter of the chain-link interlock is not extensive'; nevertheless, these two references are still 'suggestive of a broad currency for chain-link interlock in the ancient world' (p. 15) since, like the chain-link interlock, other valid literary structures (such as macro-chiasm) do not find explicit expression in theoretical works until late in antiquity (p. 16). Structures like macro-chiasm, however, are quite contestable, especially in New Testament usage. And while I do not deny that ancient texts contain Longenecker's construction (or something like it), if the chain-link interlock had an established theoretical status as a legitimate and common rhetorical device, one would expect more explicit and more extensive mention of this construction within the relevant theoretical handbooks.

The second point in Longenecker's triangulation of evidence for the chain-link interlock is found in a wide range of non-New Testament texts from diverse periods and literary perspectives, from Pentateuchal and deutero-canonical texts to Greco-Roman biography. Judging by the wide assortment of evidence Longenecker marshals, it is unclear how these texts relate to the theoretical justification for his categories. If the device he mentions is a technique drawn from Greco-Roman rhetorical theory, as he seems to suggest in other places, then would we expect to

find the device in the Pentateuch? Perhaps he intends to align himself more closely with the school of universal rhetoric at this point, which insists that certain rhetorical principles form a universal foundation from which all effective communication borrows. This would make more sense out of the application to these earlier predominantly Jewish texts, but seems to go against the general tenor of his work which attempts to ground its findings in ancient rhetorical theory. Greater clarity regarding this connection would have aided the reader.

As for the analysis of the chain-link interlock within particular non-New Testament passages, some readings are more convincing than others. For example, Longenecker draws attention to the textual seam between Genesis and Exodus (pp. 60-62). Surprisingly (given his generally extensive knowledge of and reference to secondary literature), he does not take note of strikingly similar observations made by John Sailhamer concerning narrative seams between the volumes of the Pentateuch (*The Pentateuch as Narrative* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995]). The key to the identification of the chain-link interlock at the seam between Genesis and Exodus, as well as in antiquity generally, is the inner 'b–a' frame which involves anticipation (b) and retrospection (a). The anticipatory element is found in Gen. 50.24 with Joseph's reference to God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. The retrospective element is found in the reference to Joseph's death in Exod. 1.6. Although one wonders whether these features are an intentional (artistic) transitional device or a natural literary effect of the narratival ordering of the books, Longenecker's pattern is undoubtedly evident and—even in the case of the later—descriptively helpful. Other suggestions for the interlock, however, are not as clear. The anticipatory element in the textual seam between Daniel 1–6 and 7–12 (pp. 74-79), for instance, is unconvincing. Longenecker suggests that the reference in Dan. 6.28 to the reign of Darius looks back to the folklore section of the book (1–6) while mention of Cyrus foreshadows his appearance in 10.1. If the redactor intended to employ a chain-link interlock at this point, however, one would expect a more comprehensive (or at least representative) forecast of the material to come in the succeeding section and a more natural connection to the directly subsequent material (e.g. reference to Belshazzar in 7.1). It is also unclear why the reference to Cyrus should be read as anticipatory since he is mentioned in 1.21 with the disclosure of the length of Daniel's term under the king. Far from being an unambiguously anticipatory reference, therefore, this text

actually offers a suitable conclusion to the folktale section of the book by reaffirming the duration of Daniel's service. The reading Longenecker suggests is possible, but vague in its relation to the transitional and anticipatory nature of the passage.

The final source of evidence Longenecker draws from is the New Testament itself. This investigation takes up the majority of the book. He notes several examples of the construction in Romans, Revelation, John's Gospel, and Acts and offers a carefully chosen representative sampling of passages. Like his analysis of non-New Testament texts, some readings are more compelling than others. The chain-link construction is quite clear in Rom. 10.16-17 (pp. 93-95). Longenecker suggests that text unit A consists of 10.14-17 while 10.18-21 and what follows comprises text-unit B. Verses 16-17 are identified as the elements of the inner frame with v. 16 having an anticipatory function and v. 17 looking back in retrospection. Verse 16 looks forward to the series of quotes from Isaiah and strongly anticipates the theme of disbelief in Israel that follows in vv. 18-21 and beyond while v. 17 provides a fitting conclusion to the kerygmatic motif in 10.14-17 (other treatments are equally convincing, e.g. Rev. 22.6-9 [pp. 104-112]).

What seem to me to be the more unlikely readings usually result from weak support for one of the two inner elements. Using another passage from Romans, Longenecker argues that 12.14(15?) anticipates material found in 12.17-21 whereas 12.(15?)16 reiterates material found in 12.9-13 (pp. 95-99). He makes a good point about lack of structural clarity in the passage. However, I am unconvinced that his chain-link proposal is the way forward on this issue. Instead of having well-defined interlocking connections, in line with Greco-Roman paraenetic material, the passage contains a series of loosely connected, usually independent exhortations. There is some connection, perhaps, between 12.14 and 12.16 onward, insofar as blessing one's persecutors may involve living in harmony with others and not executing vengeance on those who oppose you. This connection is far from explicit, however. The retrospective element is even less apparent. 'Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep' seems to function in a series of fairly self-contained commands rather than serving to review or reflect on previous material. Longenecker attempts to establish the connection more directly by suggesting that the first set of commands concerns Christian community and the second set refers to the boundaries of that community (p. 98), but this still leaves

material unaccounted for (e.g. Why should we think the command not to repay evil for evil [10.17] does not refer to the Christian community?).

Other issues arise in his analysis of John's Gospel and Acts. Longenecker sees Jn 12.20-50 as a chain-link interlock, transitioning from text unit A (Jn 1.1–12.50) to text unit B (the part from John 13.1 on). This kind of macro-level literary phenomena is immediately subject to question as we have very little testimony of it in the ancient theoretical handbooks. Apart from this methodological concern, the proposed analysis does not hold up under scrutiny since there is anticipatory material in the retrospective element of the interlock (12.37-50) and a good amount of retrospective material in the anticipatory section (12.20-36, e.g. the light motif [1.4, 3.21, etc.], eternal life [3.15, 4.14, etc., with only two occurrences after ch. 12], and judgment [3.19, 5.22, etc.]). It is interesting that many of the same themes that are found in 12.20-36 (light, judgment, glory, etc.) are the very themes that are continued in 12.37-50 so that the line between anticipation and retrospection is substantially blurred. The weight of Longenecker's case for the forward looking nature of 12.20-36 is the emphasis on the death and glory of Christ. The glory motif, however, has already frequently occurred in John and while the death of Christ is clearer here than it has been previously, it is built out of the serpent motif already established in Jn 3.14 and 8.28. Longenecker recognizes this problem (cf. p. 136), but insists that the motif is most clearly connected to Christ's death in John 12 and, therefore, should be viewed in relation to subsequent instead of previous material. Yet if John was intentionally employing a chain-link interlock transitional device within this large span of text, involving a very specific literary pattern (A–b–a–B), it seems to me that the division of material would be tidier.

In Acts, Longenecker suggests that the chain-link interlock forms a solid basis for unit-delineation. He proposes the following structure based on these connections (p. 229): 1.1–8.3; 8.4–12.25; 13.1–19.41; and 21.1–28.31. This brings up several concerns regarding his basis for defining units. Often he depends on the chain-link to define a unit, when the units are said to be part of the structure itself. He also makes the chain-link interlock the sole criterion for unit delineation which seems to me to overstate the importance of the construction. Clearly, in understanding the partitioning of large units of text we need to take into consideration more than just sections of overlapping material. Patterns

of semantic continuity (e.g. process and participant patterns), topical and lexical cohesion, discourse markers, prominence, referential continuity, and the rhetorical strategy of the author must all be weighed and given considerable attention in the determination of global- and local-level structural divisions. The contribution of linguistic features to the creation of units in a text is multifactoral and should not be based entirely on one construction.

There is undoubtedly merit to Longenecker's observations about overlapping material and the interrelation of units in the structure of New Testament and other ancient material. I question whether it is a rhetorical category *per se* and whether the ancient theoreticians would have been familiar with it as such. I do, however, agree with the essence of Longnecker's thesis, that at paragraph or unit boundaries there is often an overlap of material that results in a blending involving anticipatory and retrospective elements. Longenecker is very convincing in demonstrating the legitimacy of this construction in several places. Yet his portrayal of the phenomena within a literary-rhetorical framework often results in *ad hoc* analysis in which one of the two inner elements is weakly supported. Linguists working within the field of discourse analysis have made similar observations where the blending of semantic features across paragraph and unit boundaries is the result of global cohesion or texture created by effective communication techniques instead of artistic composition. Perhaps discourse analysis would provide a more suitable (i.e. less *ad hoc*) conceptual framework for the explanation of anticipatory and retrospective material at text unit boundaries.

Biblical scholars have become increasingly interested in the structure of New Testament language and literature. Longenecker identifies a pattern that has significant relevance to this ongoing discussion and his work should be consulted by all who are interested or involved in it at any level.

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