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The Rhetoric of Interruption

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Daniel Lynwood Smith

The Rhetoric of Interruption

Speech-Making, Turn-Taking, and Rule-Breaking
in Luke-Acts and Ancient Greek Narrative

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To the new Sarah Smith of Golders Green

Acknowledgments

There are many who deserve to be acknowledged in these opening paragraphs, One in particular. Were I to turn now to an exhaustive listing of debts, I would run the risk of boring my reader and offending those omitted. I will thus limit myself to a few paragraphs, fully aware that much more could be said.

This monograph is a lightly revised version of my doctoral dissertation, written at the University of Notre Dame under the direction of (now Emeritus) Professor David E. Aune. I am most grateful to David for introducing me to the intriguing profusion of interrupted speech in Luke-Acts. He encouraged me, offered detailed feedback in conversation and on written drafts, and worked in many other ways to help bring this project to its successful conclusion. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Professor Christopher Baron and Dean Gregory Sterling, who offered timely and insightful feedback, frequently alerting me to further sources that have greatly enriched the content of this volume.

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Daniel Lynwood Smith

4 July 2012

East Washington, New Hampshire

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Chapter 1

Interruption and Rhetoric in Ancient Greek Literature

1.1 Introduction

Interruption is a relatively common feature of our quotidian conversations in the United States. Interruption is not, however, simply a private affair; televised political debates frequently include numerous instances of overlapping speech. Mirroring private and public reality, contemporary novels commonly feature mid-sentence interruptions. Interruption is so widespread nowadays that its presence in ancient Greek literature might seem unremarkable.

Interrupted speech was certainly not an unknown phenomenon in the ancient world, at least in some venues.¹ For instance, Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes how, following a contentious debate between consuls and tribunes, one of the latter introduces a law specifically forbidding the interruption of a tribune.² While interruption may have been a common feature of Greek and Roman political discourse, ancient Greek literature did not always reflect this reality.

Interrupted speech is comparatively rare in ancient Greek narratives. Typically, a speech is allowed to run its course. For example, Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War includes among its many famous speeches only one interrupted speech.³ Xenophon's *Hellenica* likewise has only one interrupted discourse.⁴ Speeches abound in ancient Greek narratives; interruptions do not.

When viewed against this background, the high concentration of interruption in the Acts of the Apostles calls for an explanation. For decades, scholars have been commenting upon the several "interrupted

1 For an account of the role of *θήρυς* in ancient Greek assemblies, see Victor Bers, "Dikastic *Thorubos*," *History of Political Thought* 6 (1985): 1-15.

2 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 7.17.5. This passage will be treated further in Chapter 2.

3 Thucydides, *Hist.* 4.96.1.

4 Xenophon, *Hell.* 3.1.19.

speeches" (or *Redeunterbrechungen*) of Acts, usually devoting a stray sentence or footnote to this peculiar phenomenon. In response to the question of why the speeches are interrupted, answers vary from Dibelius' claim that interruption is a "literary device" that is unique to Acts, to Bauernfeind's hypothesis that interrupted speeches reflect the historical experience of early Christian preachers, to Pervo's observation that Luke's frequent use of interruption is similar to that of ancient novelists.⁵ Scholarship is divided over which speeches in Acts should be classified as interrupted and whether interruption should be considered a literary device or a historical accident. The central question is this: why are there so many interrupted speeches in Acts?

In order to expand and refine the conversation, we first need to re-frame the question. Rather than examining "interrupted speeches," this study investigates "interrupted speech" in ancient Greek literature. Not only will we address interrupted speech in both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, but we will also make sense of Luke's usage of interruption within its wider literary context. We will temper Dibelius' assertion that interruption is "rarely to be observed elsewhere in the work of the ancient historians." While most speeches are depicted as complete, interrupted speech is present throughout Greek epics, histories, and novels from Homer's *Iliad* onward.⁶ With this wider context in mind, we will argue that careful attention to the frequency, form, and function of interruption in Luke-Acts shows how our author makes systematic use of a long-standing literary device to highlight the ways in which different audiences receive the early Christian preaching about Jesus and the salvation he makes available to Jews and Gentiles.

From the beginning of the Gospel to the end of Acts, Luke uses intentional interruption to underscore the rhetorical effect of this preaching on different audiences within the narrative, an effect that can be positive or negative. While interruptions can occasionally signify enthusiastic agreement, interruption typically marks conflict. Armed conflict plays a central or otherwise significant role in works from Homer's *Iliad* to Herodotus' *Histories* to Chariton's *Callirhoe*. Unlike many other ancient Greek histories, Luke-Acts does not recount the sacking of cities or the clash of phalanxes. However, Luke-Acts is full of "contests of words," where speakers engage their audiences with dynamic dis-

5 Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Heinrich Greeven; trans. Mary Ling; London: SCM, 1956), 161; Otto Bauernfeind, *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (ed. Volker Metelmann; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1980), 404n79; Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 76.

6 Dibelius, *Studies*, 161.

courses.⁷ In these verbal conflicts, which do occasionally result in physical violence (e.g., Acts 7), interruption functions both to emphasize the essential content of a discourse and to mark key conflicts between speakers and hearers for the audience of the narrative.

Thus, we will attend to two levels of rhetorical function, distinguishing between the rhetorical effects of speeches on audiences within the narrative on the one hand, and the rhetorical effect of interrupted speech on the audience of the narrative on the other. This latter function of interrupted speech falls into the category of what Tannehill labels Luke's "narrative rhetoric."⁸ Our rhetorical analysis of different interruptions within Luke-Acts will allow us a window into the narrative rhetoric of Luke-Acts as a whole.

1.2 The Speeches of Acts in Modern Scholarship

Although our treatment will include interruptions in both Luke and Acts, the scholarly discussion of interrupted speeches has centered on the discourses of the latter volume. Hence, we will start with the history of scholarship on the speeches of Acts. While scholars have been studying the speeches of Acts for centuries, there is little agreement about which discourses qualify as "speeches."⁹ Cadbury, for example,

7 In Book 16 of the *Jewish Antiquities*, King Herod's siblings Salome and Pheroras take part in what Josephus calls ἡ τῶν λόγων...ἄμιλλα ("the contest of words"). See Josephus, *A.J.* 16.217. Similar phrases occur in Homer, *Il.* 1.304; Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.64.1; Chariton, *Call.* 5.8.4-6. In his *Studies*, Dibelius would restrict the label ἄμιλλα λόγων to scenes featuring "an exchange of speeches," such as Acts 24 (150). With regard to the difference between Lukan theological aims and the typical subject matter of ancient Greek historiography, Dibelius also observes that, in Luke-Acts, the "political aim of ancient history is supplanted here by the desire to preach and to teach" (166).

8 Robert C. Tannehill, *The Gospel according to Luke* (vol. 1 of *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 8.

9 Richard Pervo remarks upon "the lack of agreement about just how many speeches Acts includes" in his "Direct Speech in Acts and the Question of Genre," *JSNT* 28 (2006): 285-307, here 288. For a general review of scholarship on Acts from Chrysostom to the 1960s, see W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989). For a review of nineteenth-century scholarship on the speeches of Acts, see the helpful summary in Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 2-5. A more recent work is Osvaldo Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography* (SNTSMS 144; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); see esp. his comments on the history of scholarship on pp. 16-38.

treats twenty-four “principal speeches.”¹⁰ Dibelius also counts “about twenty-four” speeches, including only speeches that “are addressed to, or are known to have claimed the attention of a large number of people in some other way.”¹¹ Kennedy arbitrarily chooses to treat the twenty-five “discourses in Acts consisting of four or more verses,” thus excluding some discourses included by Dibelius (e.g., Acts 14:15-17), while adding others excluded by Dibelius (e.g., the prayer in 4:24-30).¹²

In the following years, scholarly estimates fluctuated dramatically. Horsley considers only “the ten set speeches of reasonable length (judging this by the criterion of the overall size of Acts).”¹³ Aune, on the other hand, counts the “thirty-two speeches of Acts (excluding short statements).”¹⁴ More conservatively, Hemer refers to “twelve major speeches,” apparently along the lines of Horsley’s proposed “ten set speeches.”¹⁵ In his monograph on the speeches of Acts, Soards points out that scholars “routinely refer to twenty-four speeches...but, in fact, there are twenty-seven or twenty-eight speeches, seven or more ‘partial speeches,’ and at least three ‘dialogues.’”¹⁶ Surprisingly, what looks like a corrective to scholarly imprecision is merely a perpetuation of the same: Soards never defines what he means by “partial speeches,” nor does he explain why there are “twenty-seven or twenty-eight” speeches. He defines “speech” as follows: “A speech is a deliberately formulated address made to a group of listeners.”¹⁷ However, the first “speech” on Soards’ list is “The words of the risen Jesus and the angels to the apostles (1:4b-5, 7-8, 11).” It is hard to see how these verses constitute “a deliberately formulated address.” In the end, Soards lives up to his goal of being “as inclusive as possible.”¹⁸

10 Henry J. Cadbury, “The Speeches in Acts,” in *Additional Notes to the Commentary* (ed. Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury; vol. 5 of *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake; London: Macmillan, 1933), 402-27, here 403.

11 Dibelius, *Studies*, 150. Dibelius is followed by Gerhard Schneider, who counts „24 Reden“ in *Die Apostelgeschichte* (HTKNT 5; 2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1980-1982), 1:96.

12 George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 116.

13 G. H. R. Horsley, “Speeches and Dialogue in Acts,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 609-14, here 610.

14 David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 124-25.

15 Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (ed. Conrad H. Gempf; WUNT 49; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1989), 415.

16 Soards, *Speeches*, 1.

17 Soards, *Speeches*, 20. Soards has apparently borrowed the description “partial speeches” from Schneider, who refers to „Redestücke“ in *Apostelgeschichte*, 1:96.

18 Soards, *Speeches*, 20-21.

Fitzmyer whittles Soards' list down to twenty-eight speeches, yet he offers no precise criteria beyond the statement that these are "the passages of Acts that I think should be considered as speeches or discourses."¹⁹ This honest assessment reveals the inherently subjective nature of defining the "speeches" of Acts. Hence, while we will continue to explore scholarship on the "speeches" of Acts, this study will make no attempt to categorize what is or is not a "speech," instead examining all direct and indirect discourse in Luke-Acts for the presence of interruption; our focus is on "interrupted speech" rather than "interrupted speeches."

However many speeches there are in Acts, scholars are inclined to agree upon their cumulative significance. Yet, the precise nature of this significance is controversial. For some scholars, the speeches have been primarily of historical interest, whereas others have seen the speeches more as reflections of Luke's literary-theological program than as repositories of apostolic preaching. Before we turn to an examination of interrupted discourses and their rhetorical function, we should first examine the role of historical investigation in scholarship on the speeches of Acts.

One of the earliest publications devoted solely to the speeches of Acts was the printed version of Bruce's 1942 Tyndale New Testament Lecture.²⁰ Bruce argues for the historicity of the speeches. To support his claim, he turns, as do many scholars before and after him, to a discussion of Thucydides' famous comment on speeches:

And as far as what each one said in a speech, either when they were about to do battle, or when they were already engaged in battle, it was difficult to record with precision the words that were spoken (χαλεπὸν τὴν ἀκριβείαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων διαμνημονεῦσαι), both those that I heard and those that have been reported to me from some place or another. Just as it seemed to me that each one would have said the most necessary things concerning their state of affairs, considering that these things are closest to the general sense of what was truly spoken (ἐγγύτατα τῆς συμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων), so I have written.²¹

19 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 104.

20 F. F. Bruce, *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale, 1942).

21 Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.22.1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are my own. Citations and translations from the *History* are based on the text of C. Hude, ed., *Thucydidis Historiae* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1898-1901). In his short study on the speeches of Acts, Horsley remarks, "It is almost *de rigueur* for those commenting upon the speeches as a distinctive element in Acts to refer to Thucydides 1.22" (609).

This passage has been interpreted in various ways. Scholars can agree that Thucydides and his sources found giving a verbatim report of “the words that were spoken” impossible, and thus he substituted “the most necessary things concerning their state of affairs” (περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστα). But does this amount to an attempt at “recording what was actually said,” or is it “recording what the historian thought the speakers would have said” on that occasion?²²

Between the poles of faithful reproduction and free invention lies a range of intermediate views and, in at least one classicist’s opinion, the truth: “Thus elements both of fidelity and invention are present here. Moderns, not surprisingly, tend to choose one strand over the other, although Thucydides does not.”²³ Bruce clearly tends toward the strand of fidelity: “there is little doubt that Thucydides conscientiously kept his promise to the best of his power, ‘adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.’”²⁴ By implication, Luke the historian preserves what Bruce calls a “historical conscience,” and Bruce bolsters this characterization by noting Luke’s fairly scrupulous preservation of Mark.²⁵ While Bruce concedes that the speeches of Acts are not “*verbatim* reports,” he sees good grounds “for believing these speeches to be, not inventions of the historian, but condensed accounts of speeches actually made, and therefore valuable and independent sources for the history and theology of the primitive Church.”²⁶

Like Bruce, Dibelius begins his discussion of Luke’s speeches with a comparison to Greco-Roman historiography. Dibelius, however, emphasizes examples that tend to imply that speeches were more the result of free invention. In keeping with this view, he points to the contradictions between a speech of the Emperor Claudius preserved in an inscription and the (supposedly) same speech recorded by Tacitus in his *Annals*.²⁷ Dibelius mentions Thucydides’ comments on speeches, but he criticizes the historian’s “crudeness and obscurity of style,” which

22 F. W. Walbank, *Speeches in Greek Historians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 4.

23 John Marincola, “Speeches in Classical Historiography,” in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (ed. John Marincola; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2011), 118-32, here 121.

24 Bruce, *Speeches*, 6.

25 Bruce, *Speeches*, 7-8.

26 Bruce, *Speeches*, 27. For one earlier and similarly positive assessment of the historical value of certain kerygmatic speeches in Acts, see C. H. Dodd, who suggests that “the author of Acts used his historian’s privilege with considerable restraint” in his *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments: Three Lectures with an Appendix on Eschatology and History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 30.

27 Dibelius, *Studies*, 139. Dibelius also cites Josephus’ divergent accounts of a Herodian speech in *B.J.* 1.373-379 and in *A.J.* 15.127-146.