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Jonathan CHARTERIS-BLACK, *Politicians and Rhetoric.  
The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*

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## REFERENCES

Jonathan Charteris-Black

*Politicians and Rhetoric. The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Palgrave MacMillan (Basingstoke), 2006. ISBN : 978-0-230-01981-2, Prix : £19.99, 256 pages

- 1 Jonathan Charteris-Black analyzes the metaphors of politicians throughout this book, but he is also capable of coining memorable expressions himself. As he states in his final chapter, “Metaphor to a politician is what sex appeal is to an individual: a covert way of sending out messages of desirability” (p.198). This analogy implies that politicians who use metaphor effectively can lure supporters to their side, while those who cannot probably will not survive for long in the competitive arena of modern politics. As this book demonstrates, however, modern political discourse is thoroughly permeated with metaphor. Indeed, few politicians seem capable of making important speeches without using metaphors to try to achieve their political goals.
- 2 Of this book’s eight chapters, the six main ones are case studies analyzing the rhetoric of three British and three American leaders over the last seventy years. In chapter 2, Charteris-Black studies Churchill’s rhetoric, especially during World War II. Critical Metaphor Analysis, Charteris-Black’s methodology for analyzing political rhetoric, involves three simple steps: identifying metaphors, interpreting them, and then explaining them (p. 26). Churchill, arguably the greatest English political orator of the twentieth century, consistently used several prominent metaphors in his speeches between 1940 and 1945. For example, he often personified Britain positively and Nazi

Germany negatively, imagining Britain as a hero and Nazi Germany as a monster (p. 43). Second, Churchill frequently contrasted Britain and Nazi Germany by contrasting terms of light and darkness (p. 51). While he referred positively to Britain as a “beacon of salvation,” he referred to Nazism negatively by calling it “the dark curse of Hitler” (p. 52). Third, Churchill often spoke of the war and the struggle to win it as a journey. On 10 August 1940, for instance, he stated: “The road to victory may not be so long as we expect. But we have no right to count upon this. Be it long or short, rough or smooth, we mean to reach our journey’s end” (p. 48). For Churchill and his listeners, in other words, winning the war was construed as successfully completing a journey whose destination was victory.

- 3 In chapter 3, Charteris-Black turns his attention to Martin Luther King, Jr. even though King did not hold an elected office. While King often spoke of racial segregation as an illness, a prison, or as slavery, he usually spoke in Biblical terms of the political fight for freedom and equality as a journey through a harsh landscape to a promised land (p. 84). That is, to understand abstract target domains like equality or segregation, King evoked concrete source domains like prisons or journeys. For example, in a speech on 7 April 1957, King said: “The road to freedom is a difficult, hard road” (p. 69). In a speech three days later on 10 April 1957, King then said: “Segregation is a tragic cancer which must be removed before our democratic health can be realized”. Also, during his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on 28 August 1963, King stated: “One hundred years later [after the Emancipation Proclamation], the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination” (p. 80). Because metaphor was just one “rhetorical technique” (p. 71) among many used effectively by King, Charteris-Black is wise to discuss in chapter 3 other techniques such as antithesis that King used as well. Simply put, the power of King’s rhetoric cannot be attributed to his use of metaphor alone.
- 4 The rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher is the topic of chapter 4. As Charteris-Black points out, aggressive metaphors of conflict were commonly used by Thatcher. She had a habit of personifying problems as enemies and imagining politics as a battle. For example, in October 1940 she spoke of “fighting unemployment” and “fighting inflation” (p. 91) while, in October 1987, she spoke of fighting “Against Labour opposition. And against Liberal opposition” in Parliament (p. 94). Thatcher also used travel metaphors when saying in October 1987, for instance: “Our third election victory was only a staging post on a much longer journey” (p. 100). She used health metaphors too when stating in October 1980, for example: “The waste of a country’s most precious assets – the talent and energy of its people – makes it the bound duty of Government to seek a real and lasting cure” (p. 102). Perhaps even more striking were Thatcher’s moral or religious metaphors, especially to criticize Socialism, which she saw as immoral (p. 105). As she stated in October 1987: “Labour’s language may alter, their presentation may be slicker, but underneath, it’s still the same old Socialism. Far be it from me to deride the sinner that repenteth. The trouble with Labour is that they want the benefit of repentance without renouncing the original sin” (p. 106). In general, Thatcher used metaphors to portray the Conservative Party and its values in positive terms and to portray the Labour Party and its values in negative terms. For instance, in October 1988 she used the analogy of master and servant to represent a Conservative view that government is the servant of the people and to attribute to Labour the view that government is the master of the people (p. 110). Although there is no appendix listing the speeches by Thatcher that Charteris-Black analyzes, Charteris-Black justifies his decision to focus

mainly on her Party Conferences speeches between 1977 and 1987 since “clear ideological statements” seem to be made whenever leaders speak to “the party faithful” (p. 89). Therefore, if some of Thatcher’s metaphors seem extreme, the Party Conference context in which they were first uttered might explain why.

- 5 In chapter 5, Charteris-Black examines Bill Clinton’s metaphors. Because of the scandals that plagued his presidency, Clinton was often engaged in damage control. Clinton mainly used three types of metaphors. First, he often reified abstractions in either constructive or destructive terms. On 20 January 1993, he referred to “the pillars of our history” and “the foundations of our nation” (p. 121). On 25 January 1994, he referred to storms which left Americans feeling as if the world were “coming apart at the seams,” and he spoke of social relations as “badly frayed” (p. 126). Second, Clinton used regenerative metaphors on 17 February 1993 when he spoke of replacing political “drift and deadlock with renewal and reform” and of an economy that he hoped would “thrive once again” (p. 129). Third, like many leaders before him, Clinton also used journey metaphors, drawing parallels on 20 January 1997, for instance, between “the journey of our lives” and “the journey of our America” which “must go on” (p. 131). Such metaphors are especially poignant, as Charteris-Black correctly maintains, “to conceptualise long-term purposes” (p. 131). While fulfilling a purpose can be thought of as traveling toward a destination, moving aimlessly or drifting around with no place to reach is a metaphorical sign of having no purpose. Clinton was a successful orator, but in this chapter Charteris-Black misses a few important points. For example, by stating the phrase, “to form a more perfect union” (p. 122), Clinton made an obvious reference to the US Constitution. When he spoke of a “new social compact” (p. 123), Clinton was alluding to the “New Covenant” that he promised to establish in America in the 1990s. Also, when Charteris-Black analyzes Clinton’s journey metaphors, he does not discuss the “bridge to the 21<sup>st</sup> century” that Clinton, when he was campaigning for re-election in 1996, promised his second term in office would symbolize. Finally, the Chamber of the House of Representatives in the US Capitol Building is “this hallowed chamber” to which Clinton referred in his 24 January 1995 State of the Union Address. Clinton does not refer to the White House as “this hallowed chamber.” The State of the Union Address is always delivered now before the joint branches of Congress in the Chamber of the House of Representatives.
- 6 Tony Blair’s so-called “Conviction Rhetoric,” which apparently integrates ethos with pathos (p. 144), is the subject of chapter 6. Charteris-Black maintains that the use of “ethical discourse is a particular characteristic of Tony Blair” (p. 147) because Blair frequently used words from the semantic fields of morality and religion in his speeches. In addition, Blair’s “use of register-shifting to legitimise his policies is his unique innovation in political speaking” (p. 146). That is to say, Blair was able to blend formal and informal styles in order to speak clearly and concisely in public. Of the metaphors Blair frequently used, among the most common were journey metaphors. For example, on 1 October 2002 he referred to the recent transformation of the Labour Party as a “journey of change” and “journey of modernisation” (p. 153). Charteris-Black also attributes the “Road Map” metaphor to Blair concerning the peace process in the Middle East (p. 152). Like Clinton, Blair also used reification metaphors. For example, he did so to positively associate good government with creation and to negatively associate terrorism with destruction. On 28 February 2003 he claimed “Labour government has created jobs in record numbers” (p. 156), while on 1 October 2002 he claimed terrorists aimed “to destroy the belief that we can collectively achieve

anything” (p. 161). To speak to the public in terms that the public could easily understand, Blair used personification metaphors too. For instance, on 15 February 2003, he stated: “If we do not confront these twin menaces of rogue states with Weapons of Mass Destruction and terrorism, they will not disappear. They will just feed and grow on our weakness” (p. 162). Finally, Charteris-Black puts into a so-called “neutral” category phrases such as “landslide winner” and “the mantle of leadership,” used to refer to the Labour Party and its duty, which Blair seems to have used from time to time (p. 163). The most important part of this chapter, however, is the summary, where Charteris-Black turns his attention to Blair’s famous 18 March 2003 speech to the House of Commons about whether or not British troops should take part in the Iraq War. According to Charteris-Black, “While metaphors – such as that of darkness and light and the personification ‘stripped of our insistence’ – provide the frame of the argument, the persuasive effect of Conviction Rhetoric is produced by their interaction with contrast, rhetorical questions, and patterns of repetition and reiteration” (p. 167). Although how exactly that “interaction” occurs is not clear, Blair’s rhetorical skill that day clearly involved much more than his effective use of metaphors to frame the argument.

- 7 Chapter 7 provides the final case study of political metaphor by examining the rhetoric of George W. Bush although, for some odd reason, a few speeches by George H.W. Bush are also discussed in this chapter. Because Bush (son) uses speechwriters, Charteris-Black assumes this shows that Bush needs to “compensate” for rhetorical skills that he does not have (p. 170). But many politicians use speechwriters, which is why a skeptic would say that sounding simple-minded must be part of a well-designed marketing strategy for Bush. Karl Rover, for instance, is often called “Bush’s brain” although his influence on Bush’s rhetoric is rarely revealed. Still, as Charteris-Black correctly shows, Bush often used the “moral accounting metaphor” to equate moral actions with financial transactions or to represent something that is abstract and qualitative (i.e. well-being) in terms of something that is more concrete and quantitative (i.e. money) (p. 173). For example, on 12 September 2002, Bush stated: “For every regime that sponsors terror, there is a price to be paid. And it will be paid” (p. 184). Here punishment is understood metaphorically as having to pay a price to set the balance of justice right once again. On 29 January 2002, Bush also spoke of the “price of the indifference” (p. 185) the US would have to pay if it did not respond to terrorist attacks with force. The assumption that justice is a balance entails an evaluation: balance is good while imbalance is bad. Such an assumption may be a primary motivation for the use of financial metaphors in the domain of morality (p. 185). But there is some confusion about this matter. While Charteris-Black realizes that the moral accounting metaphor exists in many different cultures (p. 185), he then says the metaphor is “deeply rooted in American cultural values” (p. 196). This statement appears in a paragraph that reads like a stereotypical caricature of US history, a paragraph containing some “just-so stories” that Charteris-Black evokes to try to explain how a metaphor that is used in many different cultures is nevertheless somehow a particularly American metaphor. To return to Bush, he usually personified the American nation in positive and heroic terms, but represented in negative and de-personified terms terrorists, calling them “parasites” in several speeches (p. 182). Here Bush follows a well-established political tradition of negatively personifying the enemies of one’s country. Finally, Bush used so-called “crime and punishment” metaphors to speak on 12 September 2002, for example, of “lawless” or “outlaw

regimes” (p.192) that sheltered terrorists. Again, this was an obvious rhetorical strategy to simply divide the world into countries that were either “for” or “against” the US.

- 8 That said, there remains the infamous question about methods and materials to discuss. First, phrases of the “noun – of – noun” type such as “beacon of salvation” by Churchill, or “chains of discrimination” by King, are best analyzed in terms of Fauconnier and Turner’s (2002) conceptual blending theory rather than Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor theory. What is known as rater reliability in social science is thus a problem here. Another analyst interpreting the same data without using methods from Critical Linguistics (CL) or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) might reach rather different conclusions from Charteris-Black. The general question facing CL, CDA, or CMA, is how to strive for analytical objectivity without falling into the trap of producing analyses that confirm one’s opinions about certain political leaders. Second, a given source domain can be evoked even when words like “road” or “monstrous” are not overtly mentioned. Metaphor, that is, can occur at the most subtle level and need not always require explicit reference to the source domain. Third, the speeches discussed throughout the book are assumed to be persuasive, but they are never empirically proven to be so. A vital cause and effect relation, in other words, is simply presupposed. It makes all the sense in the world to study argumentation, as Chaim Perelman did in his landmark treatise, *La Nouvelle Rhétorique* (PUF, 1958). But to study persuasion is another matter. It entails showing that an audience which believed X before a speech then believed Y after the speech. Persuasion might then be demonstrated by showing that the speech in question actually changed people’s minds. For example, in his 18 March 2003 speech in the House of Commons, did Blair change the minds of MPs in the House? Did Blair persuade listeners who did not want Britain to join America’s coalition to eventually accept his choice to join that coalition? Showing that Blair did so would provide evidence for the claim that the speech was indeed persuasive. Coercion is the product of force whereas persuasion is the product of rhetoric. But saying that “persuasion either seeks to *confirm* or to *challenge* existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours” (p. 10) seems misguided since changing minds is the *raison d’être* of persuasion. Blair’s 18 March 2003 speech, in other words, might have been targeted at those who disagreed with him rather than those who already supported his position.
- 9 Regarding the choice of materials, problems in the chapters on American leaders have already been mentioned although a book that focused only on British politicians would probably only reach a more limited audience. Moreover, ideology is discussed at the start of this book and myth at the end of it. It should be clear that both terms have negative connotations. We often use the term “ideology” to define political views we dislike, but it must be said that both right-wing and left-wing leaders have ideologies. Also, we often use the term “myth” for cultural narratives whose truth we doubt. Those who pretend to know the truth can thus use the term “myth” to make a negative value judgment. But the usefulness of the term in discourse analysis is questionable. One could analyze political rhetoric, especially of the deliberative genre, without discussing myth at all. Finally, the choice of speeches may lead to hasty generalizations about a leader’s rhetorical style. In Party Conference or Party Convention speeches, one preaches to the converted as it were and the rhetoric will reflect that fact of that rhetorical situation. In House of Commons or State of the Union speeches, however, audiences are less homogeneous. Therefore, the same number of similar types of

speeches delivered before similar types of audiences should be analyzed in order to get a more balanced yet comprehensive picture of the rhetoric of US Presidents and UK Prime Ministers.

- 10 Having said that, Charteris-Black is to be credited for writing a book that is reader-friendly style and that highlights the crucial role that journey and personification metaphors play in political discourse. Charteris-Black is also right to note that metaphor is often just one rhetorical tool among many used for the purpose of persuasion. Rhetoric, in other words, cannot be reduced to metaphor alone. However, metaphor remains important because metaphorical phrases often form the core of sound bites that are recycled endlessly by the press. Bush's infamous "axis of evil" metaphor, which Charteris-Black discusses, is but one example of this phenomenon. When the press reduces an hour-long speech to just a few phrases taken out of context, a politician's metaphors become crucially important. Given the rhetorical skills of America's new president, Barack Obama, it seems too safe to assume that another important chapter on metaphor in modern political discourse remains to be written. However, one would have to wait until Obama leaves office to write such a chapter.

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