



Book Review

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STEPHEN PIHLAJA

Newman University, Birmingham

s.pihlaja@newman.ac.uk

Charteris-Black, J. (2016). *Fire Metaphors: Discourses of Awe and Authority*. London: Bloomsbury. 248 pages; ISBN: 9781472532541 (hbk); Price: £95 (hbk).

Jonathan Charteris-Black's *Fire Metaphors* offers a study of the presence of fire in a variety of different discourses, including religious and political texts from a broad spectrum of contexts. The book aims to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the different ways that fire appears in discourses of awe and authority. The book is separated into three parts, the first looking at fire in language, cognition, and culture more generally; the second looking at fire in religious discourse; and the third looking at fire in political discourse. Charteris-Black (2016: 9) argues that fire is particularly interesting because, as a force, it offers a 'model for understanding contrastive relationships'. Fire can be used to both create and destroy, and the book investigates the ways in which this contrast is mapped on to descriptions of experiences that are also fundamentally contrastive. This includes the sacred, where, for example, fire is used both in descriptions of punishment, but also to symbolise salvation or enlightenment.

The book uses corpus methodologies to look at language related to fire in different corpora, including British and American political speeches, sacred texts, and corpora of general use like the Contemporary Corpus of American English. As a starting point, Charteris-Black shows how fire metaphors can be classified into three different types using semantic field analysis: natural fire, functional fire, and organic fire. These different types of fire are then used to unpack the appearance of fire in various discourses and support the overall argument about the ambiguity of fire and its role as a contrastive force. Throughout the book, Charteris-Black employs the force dynamic model which shows how fire is often represented as an 'antagonist' force, which is resisted by a second, 'inertia' force, with an 'agonist' being acted upon. In one particularly compelling example, Charteris-Black shows how this 'force-dynamic' model works in particular in the Old Testament of the Bible descriptions of judgement. In this example, the antagonist force is divine judgment (fire), and the inertia force is the tendency of believers to revert to pagan practices, and the agonist is the followers themselves (2016: 82). The

analysis shows that this model for describing the fear of judgment in the Bible occurs and re-occurs throughout the text, developing a vivid and compelling way of understanding judgement.

On a whole, Charteris-Black engages more with the texts and examples he is analysing than metaphor theory more broadly. By doing so, the book is a very interesting application of metaphor analysis, using the frame of metaphor to understand social practices and human experience. At the same time, although it is clearly not Charteris-Black's intention to produce a text to further metaphor theory, more engagement with the literature might be useful, particularly in explaining the frame for analysis. For example, a 'blending model' of metaphor is introduced at one point to discuss fire metaphors in Hinduism (2016:e 119-120), but the same theory is not then applied at other points in the book. More might be done to draw in the rich work done in metaphor studies in recent years to further structure the arguments in the book.

The book is successful both as an analysis of metaphor and an introduction to each of the text types it discusses. A broad range of linguists, religious studies scholars, theologians, and political scientists will find something useful within it, and the ability to draw them together in one text is especially admirable. Each chapter offers a useful background section for the discourse Charteris-Black is focusing on and he fills the book with examples from the texts he is investigating. The examples can be slightly overwhelming at times, with extracts of texts taking up large portions of some of the chapters, but this reflects Charteris-Black's commitment to building vivid and extensive empirical evidence for his claims, which is quite welcome in the field of metaphor analysis, where evidence-based models employing significant datasets across more than one text type and culture are needed. By applying the same force-dynamic model to each set of discourses, Charteris-Black is able to build a particularly compelling argument for his claim that fire is particularly salient in human experience. The fact that similarities can be seen across cultures and times offers strong evidence for the role of embodied experience in the development of metaphor. With the depth and breadth of evidence, the aim of providing a comprehensive analysis of fire in discourses of awe and authority discourses is decisively met.

Although Charteris-Black does an admirable job of applying the same force-dynamic model to each of the different text types, there is not necessarily a clear conclusion and statement about the overall importance of the study. With such a diverse potential audience for the book, drawing together the interests in a conclusion would have been welcome. Despite this caveat, the book will be useful for any student of metaphor, especially those who are interested in how embodied experience of the physical world, and particularly how natural forces of fire, appear in a variety of inter-related ways across cultures, text types, and time.