Chapter Two
KNOWING IS SEEING:
Theories of Metaphor Ancient, Medieval, and Modern
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As we saw in the first chapter, since the earliest centuries of the Church interpreters have acknowledged the imagistic or metaphorical nature of the Book of Revelation, although they disagree about what this characterization means. This suggests that bringing the insights of metaphor theory to bear on Revelation would be an appropriate and fruitful endeavor, especially contemporary theories of metaphor which emphasize the cognitive nature of this phenomenon. This is not to suggest that scholars have ignored discussions about metaphor in their work on Revelation; rather, there has been little systematic analysis of the metaphorical language in the text. Scholars who have addressed the role of metaphor in Revelation tend to do so in broad strokes. This chapter explores various scholarly discussions about metaphor in order to develop a full picture of the nature and function of figurative language. This survey will facilitate a careful analysis of one set of metaphors within Revelation, its nuptial imagery.

This chapter begins with ancient and medieval discussions of metaphor. First, the ancient and medieval theorists set the terms of the conversation about the nature of metaphor. In particular, Aristotle’s view on metaphor provides a starting point for many modern discussions. Second, unlike some modern theories of metaphor, ancient theorists approach metaphor with the assumption that metaphorical language functions persuasively. Metaphor makes it possible for an audience to “see” something in a particular way and in a way that it might not have seen before. This recognition is pertinent for studying Revelation, since Revelation seeks to persuade an audience to accept a very specific view of reality. Third, looking at medieval discussions of metaphor gives us some sense of how metaphor came to be treated as a simple trope which does not contribute to the meaning of a text. This helps explain why many scholars have tended to approach Revelation’s metaphorical language as something to be translated into literal claims.

Aristotle: Metaphor and “Bringing Something before the Eyes”

Modern scholars of metaphor often begin with an acknowledgment of Aristotle, as he is one of the first thinkers to offer a detailed study of metaphor. Andrew Ortony writes, “Because rhetoric has been a field of human enquiry for over two millennia, it is not surprising that any serious study of metaphor is almost obliged to start with the works of Aristotle.” Unfortunately, some of these “serious studies” use Aristotle’s work primarily as a foil for describing the
problematic views that seemingly ensue from his writings.\textsuperscript{4} Noting the definition of metaphor he offers in \textit{Poetics}, scholars paint Aristotle as the founding father of the somewhat misguided “comparison theory” of metaphor.\textsuperscript{5} As we will see, however, Aristotle recognizes that metaphorical language can function as a particularly effective rhetorical tool because of its ability to evoke and enliven mental images.

Before turning to Aristotle’s discussion of metaphor in \textit{Poetics}, it is necessary to gain some sense of the way in which he understands language to function. Aristotle addresses this topic in \textit{De interpretatione}, explaining that spoken words “are symbols or signs (σύμβολα) of affections or impressions (παθημάτων) of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken” (\textit{De interp.} I.5). Words stand for or represent particular mental experiences--experiences of different things or states or realities. As Umberto Eco explains, this implies a two-fold function of words: “. . . by uttering a word (or by producing other kinds of signs) one ‘means’ or ‘signifies’ a thought, or a passion of the soul, and ‘names’ or ‘refers to’ a thing . . .”\textsuperscript{6} Words do more than refer directly to things (which include immaterial as well as material things), words also conjure the human experience or understanding of the thing that is named. In this way a word is not reducible to a singular referent; rather, words point to clusters or networks of associations stemming from human experience. The signs (σημεία) assigned to these experiences differ from culture to culture (\textit{De interp.} I). There is not a necessary or inherent connection between the mental experiences of things and the particular signs assigned to these experiences;\textsuperscript{7} however, these signs do generate and shape cognition.

In \textit{Poetics} Aristotle addresses the nature and function of different types of poetry, including tragic, epic, and comic forms. One element that comprises poetry is style (\textit{λεξικόν}), which involves not what is said, but how it is communicated (\textit{Rhet.} III.1.2-3).\textsuperscript{8} In his discussion of style, particularly in reference to the nature of nouns, Aristotle offers his oft-quoted definition of metaphor: “Metaphor is the applying (ἐπιφορά–lit. ‘bringing to’) of a strange term from the genus to species or from the species to the genus or from the species to [another] species according to analogy” (\textit{Poet.} xxi.7). Instead of using the conventional or proper term for a particular thing, metaphor involves applying the term of another thing to the object or idea being expressed. Aristotle actually uses metaphorical language to describe this phenomenon. Using the verb, “to bring to” (ἐπιφορά), Aristotle depicts metaphor as the act of carrying or bringing an object from one place to another. By using a term (A) other than a conventional term (B) in a particular context, a metaphor brings the meaning of term (A) into an unusual context. Since for Aristotle a word or name refers to more than just the thing in and of itself, with a metaphor the impression or sense of the thing to which term A refers is brought to bear upon B or the thing to
which B refers. As a process of transferring terms, metaphor is more complex than a code-like substitution of one word for another.

This process of applying one term to another thing involves a perceived analogy or similarity between the things represented by the terms. The term “A” can be applied to thing “B” based upon some similarity between A and B. For example, since both evening and old age come at the end of a delineated period of time (a day and a life respectively), this similarity permits a poet to describe old age as the evening of a life (Aristotle, *Poet* xxii.13-14). The analogy inherent within a metaphor need not reflect an actual analogy between things. This is evident in Aristotle’s claim that the successful use of metaphor demands an ability to see (θεωρεῖν) or perceive the resemblances in different things (*Poet* xxii.17). Through the use of metaphor, the poet communicates this perceived similarity. Although Aristotle suggests that metaphor can be an effective means of communicating in poetry, he calls for moderation in the use of metaphor. One of the fundamental virtues in poetry is clarity and the over-use of metaphor tends to obscure rather than to clarify (*Poet* xxii.11-12).

In his essay on contemporary misreadings of Aristotle’s view of metaphor, James Mahon notes that many scholars fail to consider the discussion of metaphor in *On Rhetoric*, and so fail to recognize the complexity of Aristotle’s view of metaphor. While discussion of metaphor in *On Rhetoric* reiterates some of the observations of *Poetics* (*Rhet. I.2.1*), it augments that discussion as well. In particular, its discussion of metaphorical language reflects the overall aim of *On Rhetoric*, which is to discuss and describe rhetoric as the art of persuasion (*Rhet. I.2.1*). As part of this work Aristotle demonstrates the ways in which metaphorical language functions to persuade an audience--to “move [an] audience from one locus of thought to another . . .”  

Aristotle highlights the positive attributes of metaphorical language as part of his discussion of “clever/urbane and popular expressions” (*Rhet. III.x.1*). Metaphor and simile, which Aristotle describes as different versions of the same phenomenon, make certain popular sayings particularly effective means of teaching and persuading. Aristotle explains, “Metaphor most brings about learning; for when [Homer] calls old age ‘stubble,’ he creates understanding and knowledge through the genus, since both old age and stubble are [species of the genus of] things that have lost their bloom” (*Rhet. III.x.2-3 [Kennedy]). Aristotle observes that the analogy between stubble and old age reflects their shared genus. By exchanging one for the other, Homer highlights the aspects of old age which belong to this genus--the aspects of old age which old age shares with stubble. In transferring one word (stubble) to another context and/or word (old age), the author communicates some very particular ideas about an abstract concept.
Aristotle maintains that this is an effective means of communication; for even though the complexity of the idea may not be immediately obvious to the audience, the metaphor communicates a complicated idea in a simple phrase (Rhet. III.x.4).

Aristotle further explains that metaphorical expressions which “bring something before the eyes” (πρὸ ὀμμάτων ποιεῖν) are effective means of communication. These expressions use metaphor in the attempt to signify activity (Rhet. III.xi.6, xi.1-2). For example, in the line from Euripides “the Greeks darting forward on their feet,” the poet metaphorically uses “darting” to create a verbal image of activity. Likewise, Homer’s lines “the arrow flew” and “the spear-point sped eagerly through his breast” effectively use metaphor to create an enlivened image for the audience. Through the use of metaphor an author or speaker is able to animate the lifeless, thereby appealing to the audience’s visual imagination. In some sense, the author or speaker communicates to the audience by encouraging them to see things in the same way in which he/she does. On account of this, metaphorical expressions play a useful role in persuasive speaking.

In Poetics Aristotle describes metaphor as transferring the meaning of one word to another context based upon some perceived resemblance or similarity between the referents of the two terms. Assuming that words not only name things, but that they also conjure the impressions of the thing upon the soul, Aristotle implies that metaphor is more than a mere substitution of one name for another (De interp. I.5). Metaphor involves bringing the allusions and experiences of one thing into another context. This is based upon some perceived similarities between the two terms within the metaphor. More importantly, as Aristotle explains in On Rhetoric, metaphor allows an audience to “see” one thing in terms of another. Through the use of metaphorical language, a speaker can actually bring an idea into the sight of his/her audience, making metaphorical language quite persuasive. By conjuring the impressions of a particular thing or experience through a metaphor, an author makes visible or evident the characteristics of something else, something more abstract.

**Metaphor in the Latin Rhetorical Traditions**

While Aristotle understands that metaphor plays an important role in modern critical theory, the Latin rhetoricians writing centuries after Aristotle play a larger role in shaping the discussion which progresses throughout the Western literary and rhetorical tradition. In the writings of the Latin rhetoricians we see a tension between two trends: Trying to understand the nature of figurative language in general and attempts at delineating different figurative expressions. The latter tendency, in particular, thrives during the Middle Ages in the form of grammatical textbooks and encyclopedias.
There is an important connection between rhetoric and literary criticism or textual interpretation in the ancient tradition. While in the most basic sense the rhetorical handbooks were written to instruct students in the art of constructing and delivering speeches, they also relate to and reflect the ways in which educated individuals approached and understood written texts. In the late classical period especially, the fields of *grammatica*, which included the interpretation of literature, and *rhetorica*, as well as *dialecta*, overlapped considerably. In particular, rhetoric and grammar overlapped in their discussion of style, which includes the discussion of figurative language. Therefore, even though the rhetorical texts discuss tropes and figures as part of a larger program of teaching persuasive speech, these texts also reflect the ways in which interpreters read and understood texts.

The Latin rhetorical handbooks provided the foundation of education through the end of late antiquity and into the time of the Middle Ages. Even though in the earliest centuries many philosophers continued a long tradition of criticizing rhetoricians, rhetorical schools served as one of the primary places of education in the ancient world. As a result, these traditions not only influenced early Christian authors, including Augustine (see below), but they contributed to the shape of discourse in the Western tradition. The technical discussion of metaphor, subsumed under the larger category of “figures of speech,” developed in the Roman rhetorical tradition provides one of the standard models for understanding metaphor in the Western literary tradition.

Cicero’s name stands out among all other Latin rhetoricians. As one scholar notes, Cicero is “the unquestioned *magister eloquentiae* for the Middle Ages.” His early and unfinished rhetorical handbook, *De Inventione* (c. 92-88 B.C.E.), functioned as one of the standard rhetorical text-books in the ancient and medieval worlds. *De Inventione* lacks a discussion of style (*elocution*), which would have included a discussion of metaphor. Cicero does offer, however, an interesting explanation of metaphorical language in his later dialogue *De Oratore* (c. 55 B.C.E.). Cicero’s comments on metaphor in this work resemble those of Aristotle, including his claims about the ability of metaphorical language to address the senses of the audience.

Unlike later rhetoricians, Cicero addresses the nature of metaphorical language in general and does not make a specific point of differentiating between types of figurative or metaphorical expressions. For example, he does not specifically distinguish between metaphor, simile, and allegory. Instead, Cicero defines metaphorical language in general as involving any occasion in which words are used in a context or way which is not typical or proper. This use is based upon some resemblance (*similitudo*) between the thing expressed and the object, word, or idea
being communicated or explicated. When a “proper term” simply cannot convey the meaning intended by the speaker, the speaker “borrows” another term to convey his/her idea (De or. III.xxxviii.155-156). For instance, using an example that Cicero offers, the term “separation” (divortium) can be used metaphorically to describe an ended relationship between a husband and wife (De or. III.xl.159). This metaphor is based upon some resemblance between the separating of ways or roads and the separating of people in a marriage relationship. While the use of metaphor, such as this example, often functions to fill lexical lacunae, orators continue to use metaphor on account of its “entertaining” or pleasant quality (De or. III.xxxiii.152-155).

Cicero, again echoing his Greek forerunner, argues that metaphorical language possesses the capability of making an idea clear to one’s audience. First, he explains, through metaphor an orator can use a single word to suggest a larger picture (De or. III.xl.160). A single metaphorical word can conjure a wealth of relevant images, which add to the meaning of the idea being conveyed. Second, again sounding like Aristotle, Cicero describes metaphor as having “a direct appeal to the senses, especially the sense of sight . . .” (De or. III.xl.160-161 [Rackham]). Unlike other types of speech, metaphorical language can make sensible that which is nonsensible or abstract, thereby making the abstract reality more easily known. This is done through a speaker’s ability to highlight the resemblances between the abstract and aspects of the sensible world. For example, the metaphorical phrases “the fragrance of good manners” and “the softness of a humane spirit” draw upon resemblances between that which can be known through the senses (fragrance and softness) and that which is more abstract (good manners and a humane spirit). In particular, Cicero commends metaphors which rely upon the sense of sight, which bring the abstract into the audience’s “mental vision” (De or. III.xl.161). By making an idea “visible” to one’s audience, metaphorical language can be an effective tool in persuasion.

Although Cicero’s De Oratore is not widely referenced in the Middle Ages, a rhetorical handbook erroneously attributed to Cicero, Rhetorica ad Herennium (c. 85-80 B.C.E.), played an important role in medieval education. The treatment of metaphor in this work differs from that in De Oratore, reflecting the tendency of some Latin rhetoricians to treat style (elocutio) in a technical manner. The author of Ad Herennium discusses metaphor within his discussion of style as one of over forty different figures of speech. In this way, Ad Herennium stands at the beginning of a long tradition of texts that codify figures of speech as the tools used to embellish speech or writing.

According to the author of Ad Herennium the style of a speech primarily involves the ways in which and the extent to which an orator embellishes his/her speech (ad Her. IV.i). The Grand style of speech involves the most embellishment, while the Simple style of speech lacks
embellishment in favor of “standard speech” (ad Her. IV.viii). Specifically, an orator lends dignity (dignitas) to his/ her speech through the use of figures of thought and figures of speech. Figures of thought, on one hand, are the ways in which an orator dignifies his speech through the use of unstated ideas. For example, as a figure of thought, understatement (diminutio) involves thinking that a subject exhibits an exceptional advantage, but purposely speaking of it in moderate terms in order to avoid appearing arrogant (ad Her. IV.xxxviii). The dignity of the speech is enhanced by the idea “behind” the speech, in this case—the desire not to appear arrogant, and not specifically through the words themselves. On the other hand, figures of speech describe the specific choice and arrangement of words, which in and of themselves lend distinction or dignity to the speech. For instance, among the forty-five figures of speech described in Ad Herennium are epanaphora, when the same word forms the successive beginnings of a number of phrases, and antistrophe, when the last word of successive phrases is repeated. As we see in these two examples, in contrast to figures of thought, figures of speech typically describe the ways in which an orator enhances the “surface” of the text. Figures of speech function as tools for creating variety and embellishing a speech (ad Her. IV.xiii).

Metaphor (translatio) is one of the figures of speech codified in Ad Herennium. The author classifies metaphor as one of ten tropes—a sub-section of “figures of speech.” By definition, a trope is a departure from the ordinary meaning of a word in order to use the word in different sense (ad Her. IV.xxxi). In other words, a trope is a mis-use of a word. What makes metaphor unique from other tropes, such as onomatopoeia and metonymy, for example, is that it requires recognizing some similarity between distinct things: “Metaphor occurs when a word applying to one thing is transferred to another, because the similarity seems to justify this” (ad Her. IV.xxxiv). The author of Ad Herennium suggests that there are a number of reasons for using metaphor within a speech. While metaphor can be used for the sake of brevity or to avoid using obscenity, the first reason Ad Herennium suggests for using metaphor is to create a “vivid mental picture” for the audience (ad Her. IV.xxxiv). Overall, however, the author of Ad Herennium suggests that metaphor functions simply as one of many devices for making a speech more interesting and possibly more compelling to a speaker’s audience (ad Her. IV.xxxiv).

While Ad Herennium classifies metaphor as a figure of speech, comparisons (similibus) and simile (imago) are classified as figures of thought. This classification is fascinating, as these figures are elsewhere often associated with metaphorical language, as we saw with Aristotle. In fact, the author of Ad Herennium observes a connection between comparison and metaphor. Comparison, the author explains, “is a manner of speech that carries over an element of likeness from one thing to a different thing” (ad Her. IV.xlv [Caplan]). Comparing two unrelated terms
can be used, among other reasons, to clarify a particular idea. Further, when presenting a comparison between two things, an orator may actually use a metaphor or metaphorical language to communicate the basic comparison (ad Her. IV.xlviii.). For example, an orator may compare false friends to swallows by using the metaphor “they fly away” to describe their departure (ad Her. IV.xlviii). While the comparison of the friends and swallows lay behind the words of the text, the comparison is not explicitly stated in the speech. The metaphorical use of “fly” communicates the implicit comparison between friends and swallows. Thus, even though Ad Herennium relegates metaphor to the figures of speech, it recognizes that metaphor is related to and reflects conceptual comparisons.

Ad Herennium marks the beginning of one of the most prevalent approaches to metaphor in the Western tradition. First, this text reflects a common dichotomy between figures of thought and figures of speech, with metaphor being placed within the latter category. While the author of Ad Herennium assumes some connection between metaphor and figures of thought such as comparison, for some subsequent interpreters there is an assumption that figures of speech have little or no connection to the thought that the orator or author communicates. Metaphor, like other figures of speech, is understood primarily as an arrangement of words. Second, Ad Herennium reflects the growing tendency to approach metaphor as a trope—an intentional misuse of words. This understanding implies, among other things, that there is another “right” or “correct” way to communicate what is communicated through a metaphor. Metaphors have no communicative value other than the variety which they can bring to a speech.

While Ad Herennium establishes a precedent for treating metaphor as a trope used for embellishment, it is mistaken to assume that all of the Latin rhetoricians shared the same view of metaphor.20 In Institutio Oratoria (c. 93 C.E.), which also exerted influence during the Middle Ages, Quintilian followed the lead of Ad Herennium by classifying metaphor as a trope and treating it within his discussion of style; however, Quintilian’s understanding of style lends his discussion of metaphor a certain hue not quite achieved in Ad Herennium (Inst. VIII.vi). In some sense, Quintilian’s work bridges the gap between the understanding of metaphor that Cicero offers and that of Ad Herennium.

Quintilian argues that the element of style (elocutio) relates directly to the concepts or ideas communicated in a speech: “For the verb eloqui means the production and communication to the audience of all that the speaker has conceived in his mind, and without this power all the preliminary accomplishments of oratory are useless as a sword that is kept permanently concealed within its sheath” (Inst. VIII.Preface.15 [Butler]). Style, the selection and arrangement of words and sentences, communicates the speaker’s ways of thinking about his/
her topic. Style is not primarily the embellishment of a speech, but it involves attempting to communicate ideas to one’s audience so that the audience can be persuaded to conceive of things in the desired manner. As such, style plays an important role in the construction of a speech. Quintilian, however, also cautions his readers to avoid over-attention to style, which can diminish the clarity of one’s speech--clarity being one of the chief values of rhetoric (Inst. VIII.i.1, 22).

Quintilian’s claim that style and thought are often related extends into his discussion of tropes or figures of speech and figures (figura), specifically figures of thought. First of all, Quintilian recognizes that the distinction between tropes and other figures of speech is hotly debated; however, he finds the debate trifling:

This is a subject which has given rise to interminable disputes among the teachers of literature, who have quarreled no less violently with the philosophers than among themselves over the problem of the genera and species into which tropes may be divided, their number and the correct classification. I propose to disregard such quibbles . . . . (Inst. VIII.vi.1-2 [Butler]).

Second and more significantly, Quintilian acknowledges that the distinction between figures of speech, including tropes, and figures of thought is problematic. Dismissing the simple separation of thought and speech, Quintilian argues that the use of figures of thought often requires the use of figures of speech, “For the former lies in the conception, the latter in the expression of our thought” (Inst. IX.1.16 [Butler]). It is not uncommon for a figure of thought to be expressed in metaphorical language, making the distinction between figures of thought and tropes such as metaphor problematic.

While acknowledging the problems with the category of “trope,” Quintilian discusses metaphor along with other figures that are considered tropes. Like his predecessors, Quintilian describes metaphor as the transferring of a word’s meaning to a different or unusual context. The meaning of a particular word is borrowed by placing that word in a different context (Inst. VIII.vi.4-6). While this can be done for decorative effect, it can also be used to clarify a speaker’s idea. Metaphorical language, including metaphors and similes, can contribute to the effectiveness of a speech by bringing something before the “eyes” of the audience (Inst. VIII.iii.72, 81-2).

Although he values clarity in a speech, something which the use of tropes threatens, Quintilian offers a justification of the use of tropes:

. . . some tropes are employed to help out our meaning and others to adorn our
style, that some arise from words used properly and others from words used metaphorically, and that the changes involved concern not merely individual words, but also our thoughts and the structure of our sentences. In view of these facts I regard those writers as mistaken who have held that tropes necessarily involved the substitution of word for word. And I do not ignore the fact that as a rule the tropes employed to express our meaning involve ornament as well, though the converse is not the case, since there are some which are intended solely for the purpose of embellishment. (Inst.VIII.vi.2-3 [Butler])

Distinguishing between tropes used solely for embellishment and tropes that “help out” a speaker’s meaning, Quintilian notes that at times tropes are necessary to communicate a particular idea. It is interesting that Quintilian rejects the notion that tropes simply involve the substitution of a word for another word, since this is often how the ancient approach to metaphor is characterized. 21 In contrast to a simple substitution of words, Quintilian implies that the “mis-use” of words in a trope shapes and reflects the meaning of the sentence and the thought as a whole. This claim seemingly reflects Quintilian’s suggestion that figures of speech and thought are not easily distinguished.

Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, and Quintilian offer a sense of the variety of approaches to figurative language and specifically metaphor in the Roman rhetorical tradition. These different approaches introduced some patterns that continued into the Middle Ages. First, continuing the trend set by Aristotle, the rhetoricians generally understood metaphor in terms of transferring the meaning of a word to an unusual context. The meaning of the word is “borrowed” by placing it in a new and different setting. Second, in the Roman rhetorical handbooks we begin to see the classification of different types of figurative speech, including metaphor. Related to this trend is the tendency to distinguish between figures of thought and figures of speech. In so doing, metaphor may be relegated to the category of figures of speech, specifically a trope, even though other types of “metaphorical language” may be classified as figures of thought. The project of classifying figures of speech grows as we progress into the Middle Ages. Third, all three of the above rhetoricians seemingly suggest that while figurative language functions as an embellishment of a speech, it also can serve to clarify an argument. In making this latter claim, many of the theorists use the language of sight to describe figurative language and metaphor: Metaphor brings an idea before the eyes of one’s audience, making it possible to communicate a difficult idea. This aspect of figurative language, according to some, lends it a definite rhetorical force. At times, however, this function of metaphorical language is lost as theorists emphasized the decorative function.
Augustine and Interpreting Figurative Language of Scripture

The work of Augustine demonstrates how the rhetorical traditions reflect and shape the practices of textual interpretation. A former teacher of rhetoric, Augustine became one of the most influential interpreters of Scripture in the Christian tradition. Initially, however, his background in rhetoric, especially his familiarity with the eloquent philosophical works of Cicero, led Augustine to despair of the language of Scripture, particularly its obscure figurative language: “For not as when now I speak did I feel when I turned towards those Scriptures, but they appeared to me to be unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully [Cicero]; for my inflated pride shunned their style, nor could the sharpness of my wit pierce their inner meaning” (Conf. III.v.9). Ironically, Augustine later brought the grammatical and rhetorical traditions, which led him to hold the Scriptures in disdain, into conversation with Scripture, using these traditions as tools for interpreting the sacred writings.

In a work that became one of the most influential texts of the Middle Ages, De doctrina christiana (c. 396), Augustine draws together elements of secular thought and teaching, including the study of grammar and rhetorical theory, and the divine Word of God, for the sake of interpreting and proclaiming the latter (Conf. IV.i.2). The similarities between Augustine’s discussion of language and the Latin scholarly tradition leads contemporary scholars to debate the question of Augustine’s indebtedness to his predecessors in the rhetorical tradition, especially Cicero. Clearly, the subject matter of this work, the nature of language and grammar, including the interpretation of texts, reflected some of the central scholarly concerns and questions of his day. Furthermore, Augustine’s use of secular or “pagan” scholars “baptized” them into the Christian tradition, making them acceptable subjects of study for subsequent Christian scholars. This is not a minor point, since this enables the works of Cicero and other Latin scholars to continue to shape the ways in which scholars read and write throughout the Middle Ages.

Although this work functioned, in some sense, as a handbook for Christian scholars, De doctrina begins with a discussion more in keeping with ancient philosophical treatments of language than with the technical handbooks discussed above. Augustine begins by exploring the relationship between words and reality or things. This entails a thorough discussion of the nature of words as signs [signa] that represent things [res] or realities other than themselves. Signs, including both things and words, are the means by which one’s mind is directed to other realities (Doctr. chr. I.2). Words are signs par excellence, since they are not things in themselves, but function only in reference to other things. Further, Augustine explains, words
are conventional signs. Unlike natural signs (e.g. smoke as a sign of fire or footprints as a sign of an animal), the meaning of a word is a matter of convention, as it is agreed upon by the participants in a culture (Doctr. chr. II.ii.3).

As signs, words can be either proper or figurative. On the one hand, a word is proper if it points out the object or event to which it conventionally refers. Modifying an example from Augustine, if the word “cow” is used to represent the four-legged, bi-cusped animal which is typically referred to as a “cow” in English, than “cow” functions as a proper sign or word. On the other hand, a word is figurative if it is used to refer to something other than it was intended, if it defies conventional usage. If the word “cow” is used to refer to a human individual, then the word “cow” is being used figuratively (Doctr. chr. II.10.15). Figurative language involves the “incorrect” use of a word, since it is used in a way that defies conventional usage. Despite this, in both the proper and figurative usages, signs point to realities beyond themselves.

Most significantly, Augustine explicitly brings this understanding of language to bear upon the process of interpreting Scripture, grappling with the issue of how to understand and approach the figurative language of God’s Word. In so doing, he presupposes, like other Christian interpreters, that the language of Scripture is qualitatively different from all other forms of human language. First, since God ultimately authors Scripture, the signs of Scripture, even the figurative signs, communicate truth. This is different from secular or non-sacred texts, which may communicate ideas and claims that are not truthful. Unlike other texts, even the most obscure images and figures contain some element of God’s truth. Second, as a result of divine origin, the signs within Scripture communicate perfectly (Doctr. chr. I.36.41). Naturally, Augustine does not suggest that Scripture is always understood perfectly or properly; rather, incorrect interpretations of Scripture result from the imperfect and fallen nature of the interpreter as well as the polysemous nature of language.29

The presence of figurative language makes Scripture even more difficult to interpret: “Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness” (Doctr. chr. II.6.7 [Robertson]; cf. II.10.15). In light of this ambiguity, Augustine offers some criteria for interpreting figurative language in Scripture. First of all, he suggests, the “plainer” passages of Scripture should be used to determine the meaning of complex, figurative portions. These straightforward passages communicate all that is necessary for faith and the Christian life; thus, the Christian should study these diligently. Knowledge of these passages helps the interpreter determine the presence of figurative language. If a passage contradicts the idea of God’s love and love of neighbor, then one knows it is figurative. Augustine offers even more specific formulations of this interpretive principle. For instance, he suggests, when Scripture
seemingly attributes sinful actions to God or saints, such as gluttony or lustfulness, these actions are to be understood figuratively (Doctr. chr. III.12.18). Once the basic ideas communicated in the plainer passages are known, moreover, it is possible to use them as the means for interpreting and understanding figurative portions of Scripture (Doctr. chr. II.9.14).

Augustine’s recognition that the figurative language of Scripture presents a difficulty to the interpreter should not be understood as hostility toward figurative language. Interestingly, while Augustine originally finds Scripture’s figurative language distasteful, in De doctrina christiana he offers a positive perspective on the originality and ambiguity inherent in this figurative language. Augustine admits that he personally finds pleasure in a well-turned metaphor, such as the depiction of the Church as a beautiful woman or the holy members of the Church as shorn sheep. He suggests that the pleasure found in interpreting these figures encourages the reader to stay engaged in the text (Doctr. chr. II.6.7) Above all, the figurative nature of Scripture encourages the reader actively to search out the meaning of the text and to search out the divine source of the text. Thus, figurative language actually serves an important function in Scripture.

Furthermore, in his discussion of translating Scripture, Augustine suggests that figurative translations of Scripture, those which maintain the figurative language of the original, allow for a range of interpretations. To use a modern expression, figurative language “open ups” the meaning of a text. This can be a positive thing, according to Augustine. For example, he compares the translation of “And do not despise the domestics of thy seed” to the translation “Do not deny the domestics of thy flesh”(Doctr chr. II.12.17). Since the word “seed” is more figurative than “flesh,” it allows for a range of possible interpretations. For instance, the use of the word “seed” can be understood as a reference to the Word or Christ. This interpretation allows the verse to describe those “born of the . . . seed” or Christians, as well as the actual descendants of Abraham.

As noted above, Augustine understands that humanity’s fallen nature makes it difficult for interpreters to understand Scripture. It is part of humanity’s carnal nature to mistake figurative language, which often describes spiritual realities or things, for literal language, as if it described things that are fleshly or physical (Doctr. chr. III.5.9). In the final chapter of De Civitas Dei, Augustine argues that this mistake is often made by those interpreting the Book of Revelation, which is replete with figurative language. Labeling these interpreters as “chiliasts” or “millenarians,” since they interpret Revelation’s description of the saints’ thousand year literally (Rev 20:1-6), he implies that they are not “spiritual” or “spiritually minded” (Civ. XX.vii).
In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine offers a view of language and specifically figurative language that is shared by many medieval interpreters. In this work Augustine describes language in terms of signs that point to things other than themselves. These signs are conventional or culturally determined. Figurative language, according to Augustine, involves an intentional misuse of language. Defying conventional usage, figurative language uses one sign to point to something other than its proper meaning. Even though figurative language can be pleasing to hear or read, when interpreting Scripture it can be problematic. As figurative language involves a deviation from conventional meaning, it is possible for figurative language to convey multiple meanings. While this can be a positive factor, allowing for layers of meaning in Scripture, it also raises the issue of determining the “correct” interpretations of figurative language. Since fallen humans are naturally inclined to interpret Scripture “carnally” or according to the flesh, it is necessary to have some sort of guidelines for interpreting figurative language. Thus, Augustine advocates applying hermeneutical principles culled from Scripture, including the love of God and love of neighbor, to Scripture’s figurative language.

Interestingly, one aspect of the conversation about figurative language that Augustine does not include is the association between metaphor and sight. Unlike Aristotle and some of the Roman rhetoricians, who associate the persuasive nature of metaphor with its ability to make ideas “visible” to an audience, in *De doctrina christiana* Augustine does not highlight this aspect of metaphor.

**Metaphorical Language and the Four-Fold Interpretation of Scripture**

Complicating the discussion of ancient and medieval interpretation of Scripture, especially the figurative language of Scripture, is the multi-leveled rubric--the “three-fold” or “four-fold” sense of Scripture--that undergirds, both explicitly and implicitly, much of medieval biblical exegesis. Although interpretive practices differ, the levels of interpretation can be distinguished as the literal or historical, allegorical or spiritual, tropological or moral, and anagogical senses of Scripture. Given that the nomenclature of these categories overlaps with descriptions of different types of language, one must at least raise the question of how this four-fold interpretive approach relates to ancient and medieval discussions about language. Specifically, one must ask how ancient and medieval interpreters understood a text’s figurative language in relation to these interpretive categories.

Some ancient and medieval interpreters complicate the issue by implying that the four senses of Scripture include both different methods of Scriptural interpretation and different types of discourse found within Scripture. For example, in his *Literal Interpretation of Genesis*
Augustine explains, “Four ways of expounding the Law are handed down by certain men who treat the Scriptures. Their names can be set forth in Greek, while they are defined and explained in Latin: in accord with history, allegory, analogy, and etiology. It is a matter of history when deeds done—whether by men or by God—are reported. It is a matter of allegory when things spoken in figures are understood. It is a matter of analogy, when the conformity of the Old and New Testaments is shown. It is a matter of etiology when the causes of what is said or done are reported.” Augustine’s description of history and etiology suggest that these are types of material that Scripture reports or contains, rather than specific approaches to interpreting Scripture. The same is true for Augustine’s description of allegory, which refers to the text’s use of figurative language (figurate dicta). In contrast, the description of analogy may imply that an interpreter “shows” conformities between the two testaments, although it is possible that New Testament texts make explicit connections. The imprecision in Augustine’s discussion reflects the fact that the distinction between interpretive methods and the type of material within Scripture cannot be clearly demarcated.

Henri De Lubac presents the ancient and medieval interpretive method in his two volume work *Exégèse médiévale*, originally published in 1959. Lubac systematically addresses the ways in which Christian interpreters in the first twelve centuries of the Church understood and practiced the interpretation of the Scriptures. Tracing the history and development of the so-called “four senses of Scripture,” Lubac demonstrates the variety and flexibility inherent within ancient and medieval interpretive practices. Not all interpreters, actually few interpreters, systematically employed the four interpretive approaches in Scripture. In fact, the interpretive categories themselves were quite fluid. Lubac offers a telling quotation from Gregory of Nyssa’s commentary on the Song of Songs: “This anagogical contemplation [of Scripture], or this tropology, or this allegory, or whatever other name one wants to call it: we shall not dispute how to speak of it, provided that we can usefully think of it.” Clearly, Gregory’s understanding of the senses of Scripture, as expressed in this quotation, is fluid and functional.

Lubac argues that while ancient and medieval interpreters often delineate a three or four-fold interpretive paradigm, this paradigm reflects a more fundamental division between the literal/historical sense and the figurative/spiritual sense of Scripture. The quotation from Gregory of Nyssa continues:

In all these names that designate the spiritual understanding, Scripture fundamentally teaches us just one thing: that it is not absolutely necessary to stop at the letter, . . . but to pass on to immaterial contemplation . . ., in accordance with the dictum: ‘the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.’
Drawing upon the Pauline distinction between the “letter” and the “spirit,” ancient and medieval interpreters tend to approach Scripture as capable of literal interpretation, reading the text from the perspective of the historical author, as well as figurative interpretation. This latter method of interpretation allows the interpreter to “move beyond” the letter of the text. Allegorical, anagogical, and tropological approaches are different versions of the broader category of spiritual or figurative interpretation.

Furthermore, Lubac notes that figurative interpretation, which describes a variety of different approaches, reflects the notion of figurative language articulated in the ancient and medieval grammarians. This influence is evident in the names given to some of the different categories of figurative or spiritual interpretation: Tropological referring to tropes and allegorical referring to allegory. This is also supported by the Venerable Bede, who discusses the different senses of Scripture in the context of his work on figurative language, which we examine below. The idea that words, as signs, can point to things indirectly, as well as directly, provides a foundation for developing different levels of interpretation. Thus, the traditional understanding of figurative language fosters a great deal of interpretive freedom in medieval biblical interpretation. Naturally, medieval interpreters debated over how extensively figurative interpretation should be employed, some suggesting that figurative interpretations are only secondary to literal interpretations.

Rules for Reading: Figurae in the Middle Ages

On the one hand, the ancient understanding of figurative language gave rise to the creative and multifaceted interpretation of Scripture; on the other hand, there was a simultaneous impulse toward providing and following guidelines for interpreting figurative language. The latter impulse answered Augustine’s concern that interpreters of Scripture familiarize themselves with the tropes in order to understand ambiguities of the Scriptures (Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* III.29.40). Knowledge of how particular figures are constructed and function provides at least some control on the polysemous nature of figurative language. In this vein, the study and classification of figurae flourished in the Middle Ages. Looking at two medieval scholars, one writing in Spain, Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636), and one writing approximately a century later in England, the Venerable Bede (c. 673-735), demonstrates the uniformity of this tradition.

The study of grammar involved learning not only guidelines for speaking and writing correctly, but also guidelines for the art of interpreting both *scriptura* and the Christian and classical *auctores*. During this period of time, the study of grammar functioned as one of the basic academic disciplines and it shaped the ways in which individuals within the culture read
the foundational texts and, therefore, the ways in which they thought about their world.39

One of the predominant ways in which discussions about figures was carried into the Middle Ages is through the encyclopedic works which gathered together extant information on the various topics of studies. Isidore’s *Etymologies*, which devotes twenty books to an elaboration of the seven liberal arts and a summary of world history, proved one of the most popular of these works. Isidore begins this immense work with a book on grammar—the “origin and foundation” of all other subjects of study (*Ety*. I.v). This book, even apart from the work as a whole, was quite popular in the Middle Ages. As Martin Irvine notes, the influence of *Etymologies*, “. . . was enormous: this book, or a set of excerpts from it, was often transmitted independently in the grammatical miscellanies and compilations produced in the early Middle Ages, and its influence endured until the Renaissance.” 40

Isidore’s treatment of figurative language comprises a large portion of the book on grammar. In two lengthy chapters, Isidore outlines over twenty figures of speech (*schematibus*) and over twenty different tropes (*tropis*) and their sub-species (*Ety*. I.xxxvi-xxxvii) Isidore’s treatment of figurative language is quite formal or structured. First, Isidore offers a traditional distinction between figures and tropes. Figures, meaning figures of speech, involve using words and sentences in order to embellish (*orno, ornatum*) a speech or text (*Ety* I.xxxvi.1). Tropes employ a sign (*significatio*) to denote something similar, but in a way which is not proper or traditional (*proprius*) (*Ety*. I.xxxvii.1). Second, beginning with figures and then covering tropes, Isidore outlines the various forms following a set pattern: noting the traditional Greek term of a particular figure or trope, offering a Latin translation of the term, offering a terse definition, and then, perhaps, citing an example of the figure or trope. Thus, Isidore’s discussion of figurative language generally conveys a sense of classification, much like *Ad Herennium*. 41

When Isidore discusses metaphor (*translatio*), he breaks the general pattern of his discussion, offering a slightly longer treatment of this particular trope. He explains that metaphor involves the transferring of the meaning of one word to another and outlines different ways in which this transferring of terms occurs: From inanimate to inanimate object, animate to animate object, from inanimate to animate, and from animate to inanimate (*Ety*. I.xxxvii.2-4). 42 He also suggests that metaphor includes the transferring of a name from one genus to another genus or even from a part to the whole (*Ety*. I.xxxvii.5). This trope is used for the sake of making a speech more elegant (*decoris*). Isidore continued the tradition which defines metaphor as a transferring of names done primarily for decorative effect.

Isidore also described tropes that involve comparison (*similitudo*) of different terms or things, including parable and simile (*imago*) (*Ety*. I.xxxvii.32-35). As we saw in the discussion
of *Ad Herennium*, some interpreters acknowledged a connection between these figures and metaphorical language. The discussion in *Etymologies*, however, is quite brief and does not seem to reflect such a connection.

Another important and influential discussion of figurative language written in the Middle Ages was *De Schematibus et Tropis* by the Venerable Bede. Written at the turn of the eighth century, this short work was written as an instructional text for use in monastic schools. While originally written for an Anglo-Saxon context, this work, as well as other didactic works of Bede, became influential in monastic education through Europe during the time of Carolingian reform. The influence of this particular work also stemmed from the fact that it was seemingly one of the first texts on *figurae* that uses examples solely from Scripture and Christian authors. This characteristic reflected Bede’s assertion that Scripture “surpasses all other writings,” not only in terms of antiquity, but also in terms of its artistic expression. While the Greeks claim to have invented figures and tropes, these stylistic elements were present in Scripture all along. In this way Bede recognizes and extols the figurative language of Scripture.

Bede’s use of biblical examples suggests that *De Schematibus et Tropis* is intended to function as an exegetical guide. He even begins by distinguishing the figurative language of Scripture from the language of “ordinary speech” (*De Schematibus* I.5-20). In order to understand the figurative language of Scripture one must be familiar with the different schemes and figures. In this way, Bede’s work provided the guidelines for right understanding.

Although a notable and creative scholar, Bede’s discussion of figurative language bore a striking resemblance to those of his predecessors, including Isidore. Not only did Bede follow the pattern of first translating the Greek term into Latin and then offering a definition and example, but he shared Isidore’s assumption that figurative language primarily serves a decorative function. Scholars use the language of “form” and “figures” to describe figurative language, “because through it speech is in some way clothed or adorned” (*De Schematibus* I.1). Likewise, Bede’s discussion of tropes, including metaphor, echoes that of Isidore and his predecessors. Bede suggests that tropes function either “out of need,” to fill a lexical lacuna, or to embellish a speech by transferring a word from its proper meaning to another similar, but not proper, meaning. Metaphor, one of the tropes, occurs when a word or its qualities are transferred to another word. He then notes that this can take a number of forms, inanimate object to inanimate object, inanimate object to animate, and so on.

The medieval tradition of classifying different types of figurative language, as exemplified in the works of Isidore and Bede, can be interpreted in a number of different ways. In one sense, it can be interpreted as parasitic on the classical works of Cicero, Quintilian, and...
Ad Herennium. As such, the medieval scholars appropriated and perpetuated the most pedantic aspects of the classical treatments of figurative language. It is also possible to read the medieval scholars more sympathetically. The simple fact that medieval scholars chose to include discussions of tropes and figures within their works, often devoting a great deal of time to the subject, and that these discussions were widely circulated throughout the Middle Ages, points to a general concern for understanding the figurative language in Scripture. Most of all, keeping in mind that the study of grammar serves as an initial step in the process of learning how to interpret Scripture, the rules for reading figures and tropes were only one part of the larger interpretive method employed during the Middle Ages. Understood within a context of the four-fold interpretation of Scripture, which was based upon the understanding of figurative language, the seemingly formulaic classification of tropes provides at least one way of preventing innumerable possible interpretations of Scripture.

Another trend in the Middle Ages related to how figurative language was understood is the advent of manuals instructing individuals on writing official letters. As letter writing became an important means of communication within religious and political circles, these texts grew in popularity. In one such text, *Flores rhetorici* (c. 1087), the Benedictine teacher Alberic of Monte Cassino instructed and warned his audience about the influential nature of metaphorical language.

Metaphor, Alberic suggested, is one of the means by which a writer can embellish or dignify his/ her composition. However, like the ancient rhetoricians, Alberic also claimed that metaphorical language brings an idea to the eyes of the audience. This visual aspect of metaphor contributes to its persuasive nature. Alberic depicted this persuasive aspect of metaphor in negative terms:

The metaphor is a trope which frequently appears in writing, and which contributes a certain apparent dignity. For the method of speaking in metaphors has this characteristic: it turns one’s attention from the particular qualities of the object [being described]; somehow, by this distraction of attention, it makes the object seem something different; by making it seem different, it clothes it, so to speak, in a fresh new wedding garment; by so clothing it, it sells us on the idea that there is some new nobility bestowed. And what else can I call it but “selling us,” when a man takes a story that is petty in its content and heightens it by his treatment so as to convince us that it is all new, all delightful. If a meal were served up in this way, it would disgust us, would nauseate us, would be thrown out.
Using metaphorical language himself, Alberic describes the way in which a metaphor can persuade or even deceive an audience to see something in a new or different manner. The power of metaphorical language makes it potentially dangerous.

For the most part, the medieval scholars who discuss the nature and use of figurative language continued the trend, which began in the Latin rhetorical tradition, of delineating and classifying different types of tropes. This tradition is based upon the assumption that figurative language, including metaphor, involves using a word improperly for the sake of embellishment or ornamentation. The medieval scholars devoted a significant amount of time to delineating and describing the different ways this ornamentation could be accomplished. Within these discussions, metaphor functioned as one of these many different methods. The effect of this is that metaphor, like other figures of speech, is understood primarily as a phenomenon on the surface of the text with little or no relation to the actual meaning of the text. With this view of metaphor, which became the dominant view in the Western literary tradition, it is understandable why subsequent scholars, including biblical scholars, devoted so little time to exploring the ways metaphor contributes to a text’s meaning. It is important to note, however, especially in light of the comments of Alberic, that even in the medieval context theory and practice were not always in agreement.

**Turning to Modern Theories of Metaphor**

In *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism*, Mark Turner observes that classical scholars, including Aristotle and Cicero, assumed a relationship between language and thought. Addressing the topic of metaphor within the context of both poetics and rhetoric, classical scholars sought to describe the ways a speaker uses and arranges words to move his or her audience from one way of thinking to another. Metaphor or figurative language in general was assumed to be an effective means of persuading an audience by means of bringing an idea into the audience’s sight. It seems, furthermore, that this concern for the relationship between language and cognition was fostered by the fact that the classical scholars were not only rhetorical theorists, but also philosophers interested in broad questions about the human capability for thinking and learning.

The classical assumption that figurative language possessed the capability to influence thought has not always been shared by scholars, especially philosophers. In particular, the Western philosophical tradition has historically regarded metaphorical language with disdain. While the roots of this tendency appeared already in late-medieval thought, it flourished within the context of seventeenth century rationalism and British empiricism.
The philosophical disdain for metaphorical language reflected a broader shift in how scholars understand language to function. Writing on medieval concepts of “denotation,” Eco explains that in the writings of Roger Bacon we can see a definite change in the understanding of how words signify or how they communicate meaning. This view eventually became the dominant way scholars described the function of words. While prior to Bacon most scholars maintained the Aristotelian view that words signify both the mental experiences of things and the names of things, as discussed above, Eco writes that,

For Roger Bacon signs are not referred to their referent through the mediation of a mental species, but point directly or are posited in order to refer immediately to an object. It does not matter whether this object is an individual (a concrete thing) or a species, a feeling, a passion of the soul. What counts is that between a sign and the object it has been appointed to name, there is no mental mediation. It is assumed that words can and do refer directly to the things they signify, apart from any impression the thing makes upon the soul.

Ted Cohen cites works of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke as representative of the tendency to hold figurative language in contempt. Reflecting the view that words signify things, Hobbes, writing in *Leviathan*, describes metaphor as using words “in other senses than that they are ordained for.” Figurative language involves deviating from normal word usage, by replacing one word with another. Since words refer directly to things, carrying little or no cognitive content (the impressions things make upon the soul), there is no sense that metaphor involves transferring a complex of meanings or impressions from one context to another. Instead, metaphor is simply an indirect and unnecessary way of communicating; instead of referring to one thing, an author refers to another thing.

As such, metaphor bears no meaning, apart from the literal sense that lies behind a particular metaphor. In addition, both Hobbes and Locke asserted that literal language is “more true” than figurative language, as the latter involves replacing words with words that mean other things. By definition figurative language is deceptive and, therefore, less capable of communicating truth or facts. In and of themselves, metaphors are not verifiable, only the literal claims behind them are verifiable. A claim which is not capable of being empirically verified cannot, within the rationalistic and empirical system of thought, be true. As such, metaphor is purely ornamental, intended to please an audience, in contrast to literal language.

It is mistaken to assume that this philosophical prejudice against figurative language is limited to these seventeenth century scholars; rather, the trend continues even into the twentieth century. Cohen explains,
Although these remarks of Hobbes and Locke may seem remote, their import has prevailed until quite recently. The works of many twentieth-century positivist philosophers and others either state or imply that metaphors are frivolous and inessential, if not dangerous and logically perverse, by denying to them (1) any capacity to contain or transmit knowledge; (2) any direct connection with facts; or (3) any genuine meaning.55

In light of these assumptions about metaphorical language, Western philosophers have tended to avoid the exploration of the nature of metaphor, relegating the topic to literary criticism. While literary critics study metaphor, especially particular metaphorical constructions, until recently there has been very little attention given to the relationship between the metaphors as linguistic constructions, including those in literature and in every-day speech, and the mechanics of cognition. Likewise, Max Black, who, as we will see, exercises considerable influence on the discussion of metaphor, notes the ironic fact that while twentieth century philosophers are fascinated with language and meaning, they generally avoid the topic of metaphor.56 Turner attributes this, in part, to the academic tendency toward specialization and the resulting separation between academic disciplines. It has been only within the past twenty-five years that the disciplines of literary criticism, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology have been drawn together to explore the nature and function of metaphor and metaphorical language.57

Max Black: Returning to Metaphor and Thought

In his ground-breaking essay simply entitled “Metaphor” (1954), Black reintroduced the topic of metaphor into philosophical discussion.58 In this essay, as well as in subsequent works, especially in Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy, Black explored the relationship between metaphorical language and cognition, exploring the ways in which metaphorical expressions create new meanings.59

Black begins by describing the problems inherent within traditional understandings of metaphor, which he describes as the “substitution theory” and the “comparison theory.” The substitution view assumes that metaphor involves replacing one word with another word. Black explains,

According to a substitution view, the focus of a metaphor, the word or expression having a distinctively metaphorical use within a literal frame, is used to communicate a meaning that might have been expressed literally. The author substitutes M for L; it is the reader’s task to invert the substitution, by using the
literal meaning of \( M \) as a clue to the intended literal meaning of \( L \).

Understanding a metaphor is like deciphering a code or unraveling a riddle.\(^{60}\) It is assumed that the metaphorical term stands in place of the literal term and the intended meaning of the statement resides within the literal term. Metaphor functions, according to this view, as a stylistic device. In order to give pleasure to the reader, an author or speaker creatively replaces proper terms with words used in novel and interesting ways.

It is easy to see why the substitution view of metaphor is often attributed to the classical theorists, including Aristotle and Cicero, as Black himself does off-handedly.\(^{61}\) The classical theorists, especially as they are re-presented and interpreted within medieval grammars, did describe metaphor in terms of replacing one word with another and in terms of ornamentation. However, unlike the substitution view characterized by Black, the classical theorists discussed metaphor within the context of rhetorical theory, which assumes the persuasive power of metaphorical language. Also, even within the medieval tradition there was the assumption that metaphorical language produces multiple meanings, making rules for interpreting metaphors necessary. This assumption is not necessarily shared by the substitution view, which treats metaphor almost like a code that has a singular, literal meaning.\(^{62}\)

Another view of metaphor that Black addresses is the comparison view. Like the substitution view, this understanding of metaphorical language is also attributed to Aristotle by many modern interpreters. (The fact that different theories of metaphor can be attributed to Aristotle suggests to some extent the complexity of Aristotle’s presentation.) As the name suggests, this view assumes that metaphor involves a replacement of terms based upon some similarity between the two terms. For example, in the metaphorical statement “Ruth is a lion,” there is the assumption that “Ruth” shares some characteristic with a “lion.” In this view, metaphor is simply a shortened form of simile; instead, of saying “Ruth is like a lion,” the phrase is abbreviated to “Ruth is a lion.”

Black’s main objection to the comparison view is that it operates with the assumption that words have proper or single meanings. Words can be used in their proper or, in the case of metaphor, improper sense. The description of metaphor as a purposely misapplied word overlooks the fact that the meanings of words are shaped by their context within a sentence or within a larger unit of discourse.\(^{63}\) In reference to the comparison view, Black comments, with characteristic wit,

The main objection against a comparison view is that it suffers from a vagueness that borders upon vacuity. We are supposed to be puzzled as to how some expression (\( M \)), used metaphorically, can function in place of some literal
expression (L) that is held to be an approximate synonym; and the answer offered
is that what M stands for (in its literal use) is similar to what L stands for. But
how informative is this? There is some temptation to think of similarities as
“objectively given”, so that a question of the form, “Is A like B in respect of P?”
has a definite and predetermined answer. If this were so, similes might be
governed by rules as strict as those controlling the statements of physics.64
Like the substitution view, the comparison view assumes that words refer to single referents. In
the comparison view, this assumption allows one to substitute words based upon some similarity
inherent within their referents. In contrast to this, Black suggests that it might be more helpful to
describe metaphors as “creating” similarities between referents.65
In contrast to these traditional theories of metaphor, Black describes what he calls the
interaction view of metaphor. Metaphor involves the interaction between two distinct subjects--
an interaction created by their placement within a phrase, sentence, or statement. More
specifically, metaphor involves placing a particular subject, the “focus,” into a new context, the
“frame.”66 The frame, which consists of the words or phrases surrounding the focus, brings the
focus into relationship with another subject that is either stated or implied. This subject is the
primary subject—what the metaphor is primarily about. The interaction between the focus and
the frame, including the primary subject, creates new meaning for the reader.
In moving away from understanding metaphor primarily as a phenomenon involving the
substitution of words, Black also argues that a metaphor’s subjects, the focus and the primary
subject, are actually more like “system[s] of associated commonplaces.”67 The focus and the
primary, even if they consist of single words, each evoke networks of meanings and associations,
including cultural assumptions and fictions. The frame, however, acts as a sort of filter through
which particular elements of this network are highlighted and subsequently applied to the
principal subject implied in the frame. The sentence which embraces the metaphor highlights
and hides different parts of the networks implied in the focus and the primary subject. Using the
somewhat simplistic example “Man is a wolf,” Black recounts how the system of commonplaces
associated with “wolf,” the focal word, are filtered through the frame, the sentence as a whole,
and applied to the primary subject, “man.” He writes,
A suitable hearer will be led by the wolf-system of implications to construct a
corresponding system of implications about the principal subject. But these
implications will not be those comprised in the commonplaces normally implied
by literal uses of “man.” The new implications must be determined by the pattern
of implications associated with literal uses of the word “wolf.” Any human traits
that can without undue strain be talked about in “wolf-language” will be rendered
prominent, and any that cannot will be pushed into the background. The wolf-
metaphor suppresses some details, emphasizes others—in short, organizes our
view of man.68

Black’s work contributed greatly to the modern fascination with metaphor. By
reintroducing the topic of metaphor to philosophical conversation, Black opened up the way for
scholars to begin to explore the relationship between metaphor and thought. He made space for
the question of how metaphorical language can create meaning. In addition, Black pushed
subsequent scholars to move away from regarding metaphor simply as involving a word; instead,
he calls for a more complex understanding of metaphor within the context of a sentence and in
relation to the complex networks of meanings conjured up by individual words.

Paul Ricoeur: Metaphor in Terms of Tension

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur built upon Black’s interactionist theory of metaphor in his
works on hermeneutics and the philosophy of language. Like Black, Ricoeur argued that
metaphor is a phenomenon of the sentence, rather than a phenomenon occurring at the level of
the word.69 As a sentence, metaphor entails the act of predication in which a speaker attributes
the characteristics of one subject to another subject. This act of predication is not simply the
substitution of one word and its associations for another; rather, metaphor creates an event of
semantic innovation.

In conversation with the work of Black, Ricoeur contended that metaphor does not entail
a tension between the two subjects in a sentence as much as it entails tension between two
interpretations generated by the sentence. Since metaphor involves the equation of two
dissimilar subjects, the interpreter must choose between either preserving the literal and
nonsensical meaning of the sentence or accepting the new meaning assigned to the primary
subject.70 This is described in terms of resolving the semantic clash between the “is,” the
metaphorical act of predication, and the “is not,” the literal absurdity of such a predication.71
This tension creates an extension of meaning in relation to the metaphor’s primary subject; for
through the tension inherent within a metaphor, the audience or interpreter gains a new insight
into the nature of the primary subject being described.

Drawing upon the language of Gottlob Frege, Ricouer also describes metaphor in terms
of a clash between the sense and the reference of a sentence. While the sense of the sentence,
the surface meaning of the signs within a sentence, defies logic, the reference of the sentence,
which refers to the extra-linguistic, can be resolved as apt or appropriate.72 In employing the
language of “reference,” Ricoeur opposes interpreters who understand the world of the text to be enclosed, not pointing to anything beyond the text. In contrast, he argues that all discourse, including metaphorical or poetic discourse, is about something that is extra-linguistic--outside of the text. Even though poetic discourse does not necessarily refer to things that are ostensive--things that can be pointed to with a speaker’s hand--it does refer to extra-linguistic reality. Poetic or literary texts “speak of possible worlds.” This contributes to the power of poetic language, for it has not only the ability to change the ways in which one looks at the world, but it has the power to change the ways in which one lives and acts in the world. Through metaphor, the process of predating a subject with characteristics other than its own, it is possible to imagine the world in new and different ways and, subsequently, to change the world.

As metaphor involves the resolution of the tension between a sentence’s sense and reference, Ricoeur argues that metaphor does not exist in itself; rather, metaphor exists only through the act of interpretation. It is the event of resolving the tension inherent within metaphor that creates new meaning. Further, within this event, the interpreter decides which connotations of a metaphor are significant within the context of a discourse as a whole. This allows for an abundance of possible meanings:

- It is the reader, in effect, who works out the connotations of the modifier that are likely to be meaningful. A significant trait of living language, in this connection, is the power always to push the frontier of non-sense further back. There are probably no words so incompatible that some poet could not build a bridge between them; the power to create new contextual meanings seems to be truly limitless. Attributions that appear to be “non-sensical” can make sense in some unexpected context. No speaker ever completely exhausts the connotative possibilities of his words.

In this way, metaphor, while logically absurd, can give rise to a multiplicity of interpretations.

Once, however, a metaphor has been read and re-read or heard and re-heard, once it becomes familiar, the flicker of insight once conveyed in the tension between “is” and “is not” is lost. As Ricoeur explains, once metaphorical associations become part of common parlance, the metaphor is incapable of creating new meaning. Some metaphors are so common, in fact, that they can be called “dead metaphors.”

**Metaphor as Conceptual Mapping**

While Ricoeur highlights the novel aspect of metaphor, others have begun to explore the nature and function of more conventional metaphors which function as an important, if often
unnoticed, part of common speech. In so doing, conceptual metaphor theorists, including George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner, underscore the connection between thought and metaphorical language, asserting that conventional metaphors reveal the inherently metaphorical nature of human cognition. While conceptual metaphor theory is a relatively recent field of study, its roots are in the classical tradition of Aristotle and Cicero, who assumed a vital connection between thought and language. In fact, Turner expresses a desire to reclaim this aspect of the classical rhetorical tradition.

Turner argues that conceptual metaphor theory, like its classical predecessors, begins with the assumption that “audiences share many things . . . .” In particular, audiences share, “. . . conceptual systems, social practices, commonplace knowledge, discourse genres, and every aspect of a common language, including syntax, semantics, morphology, and phonology.” Audiences share a wide range of factors that influence the ways in which they interpret a speech, a poem, a letter, or some other form of communication. As we saw above, the ancient theories of rhetoric explore different ways of using an audience’s common cognitive system, including the impressions of things upon the soul, as Aristotle suggests, to the best effect.

Part of a particular audience’s cognitive apparatus, which is shaped by its culture and/ or sub-culture, includes cognitive models or image schemata. In The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason, Mark Johnson describes image schemata as, “. . . abstract patterns in our experience and understanding that are not propositional in any of the standard senses of that term, and yet they are central to meaning and to the inferences we make.” Image schemata are dynamic patterns which develop out of and which help us interpret our experiences. Again Johnson explains, that “some of our experiences have a certain recurring structure by virtue of which we can understand them.” For instance, in Death is the Mother of Beauty, Turner explores a basic kinship model which is found throughout the Western literary tradition, as well as in the literary productions of many non-Western cultures. The human experience of procreation, which produces offspring similar to the parents, provides an image schema or basic cognitive model of kinship. There are different elements which make up this model, including the various parties usually associated with kinship (e.g. mother, father, child) and the different relationships between these parties.

Image schemata, such as the kinship model, are idealized models that reflect both bodily experience and cultural assumptions. Not only do the physical human experiences of kinship— including experiences of procreation, gestation, birth, etc.—contribute to the content and shape of the model, but cultural assumptions about kinship also make up parts of the model. Consequently, even though individuals’ experiences of kinship may somehow differ from the
model, the model still exists as a culturally constructed structure.  

Image schemata are often used metaphorically to understand or “structure” experiences other than those which they represent. An image schema can be “mapped on to” another experience or a concept as a way of understanding the latter. This metaphorical extension of an image schema resembles Black’s suggestion that metaphor involves bringing together two different semantic domains, which include subjects and their networks of associated commonplaces. However, in contrast to Black, conceptual metaphor theory underscores that this merging of domains, called source and target domains, occurs primarily on the conceptual level rather than the linguistic level. Linguistic expressions of a metaphor actually reflect prior conceptual mappings of domains.

A classic example of the way in which an image schema metaphorically structures another domain is the traditional metaphorical connection between the experience of walking down a path or taking a trip (source domain) and a love relationship (target domain). The image schema of walking down a path or road provides a structure for understanding and talking about the more abstract experience of a love relationship. This metaphorical mapping or “basic conceptual metaphor” can be written as LOVE IS A JOURNEY. This basic conceptual metaphor can be expressed in a variety of linguistic forms, including statements such as “Our relationship has reached a dead end” or “We’ve come to an important turning point in our relationship,” however the metaphor itself is the conceptual structure behind the linguistic expressions.

In a basic conceptual metaphor the source domain’s image schema provides the structuring device or a pattern that shapes the way in which one conceives of the more abstract referent of the target domain. The network of concepts and relationships inherent in the source domain (e.g. a journey) are said to be “mapped” on to the network of concepts and relationships within the target domain (e.g. a love relationship). In this way the source domain organizes the information within the target domain. A speaker or author selects various aspects of the metaphorical mapping in her expressions. For example, referring to the basic metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, an author’s expression of the metaphor can focus upon one aspect of the metaphor, such as the destination. This does not mean that the author’s audience will not bring other aspects of the basic conceptual metaphor’s structure (e.g. twists in the path, junctures, the travelers on the journey, a vehicle for traveling on the journey, etc.) into their reading of the metaphorical expression. Even though an author or speaker may introduce a basic conceptual metaphor into conversation, highlighting and hiding various aspects of the metaphor’s structure, an audience is not bound by the author’s expression of the metaphor. Rather, the presence of a
basic conceptual metaphor, the underlying structure of the expression, seemingly invites audience participation. This necessarily leads to the poly-valence of metaphorical expressions.

While an audience may recognize aspects of a basic conceptual metaphor which an author does not explicitly express (or intend), an author’s use of a particular conceptual metaphor in the first place is a means of shaping an audience’s thought. A basic conceptual metaphor itself necessarily highlights and hides various aspects of the concept it structures. For instance, drawing again upon the above example, using the human experience of a journey to describe a love relationship will highlight various aspects of the love relationship which another basic conceptual metaphor, such as LOVE IS A GAME, will hide and vice versa. As Lakoff and Johnson explain, “. . . the metaphorical structuring involved here is partial, not total. If it were total, one concept would actually be the other, not merely be understood in terms of it.”88 Consequently, an author’s use of a particular metaphorical mapping encourages an audience to consider certain aspects of the target domain over other aspects inherent in the domain. This fact explains, at least in part, the rhetorical force of metaphor. By encouraging an audience to conceive of a reality in a specific way and not in another way, an author attempts to shape how an audience thinks about that reality and accordingly speaks and acts in light of that reality.

Understood in terms of cognition, metaphor possesses an amazing rhetorical force. Not only does an author or speaker have the ability to shape the way an audience understands a particular concept through the use of a particular conventional metaphor, but an author or speaker can also use metaphorical mappings to try to challenge conventional ways of envisioning a particular concept. An author or speaker can alter metaphorical mappings to challenge conventional ways of thinking about abstract concepts. This can subsequently change the ways in which individuals act in relation to a particular situation.89

Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a Guiding Method

As a reaction against theories of metaphor that focus on metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon, conceptual metaphor theorists downplay the ways metaphor appears in linguistic constructions. Similarly, in an attempt to highlight the pervasive nature of metaphorical thinking, conceptual metaphor theorists (with the notable exception of Turner) focus heavily upon metaphor usage in “everyday speech,” instead of in literary texts. As a result, Gerard Steen observes, metaphor theory, as articulated by Lakoff, Johnson, and Turner, lacks both a systematic method for analyzing and describing the linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphors in literature and a method for identifying the conceptual metaphors which “stand behind” linguistic metaphors.90 In response to these lacunae, Steen has begun the process of
articulating a method for analyzing and describing metaphor within literary texts. Even though this work remains in its early stages, it provides a guide for our analysis of Revelation.

Ideally, conceptual metaphor theory should provide a method for analyzing a text that allows us to examine the metaphorical language of the text, the “linguistic metaphors,” in relation to the conceptual mappings which undergird this language, “the conceptual metaphors.” This suggests that our method entails two inter-related tasks: identifying/ describing the linguistic metaphors within a given text and identifying/ describing the conceptual metaphors which seem to be present within the text. This also can be described in terms of analyzing the “surface” of the text and the metaphorical structures which “undergird” or “lay behind” the text.

Steen, furthermore, suggests that careful textual analysis includes articulating how one moves from a text’s linguistic metaphors to its conceptual metaphors. While the following articulation of a method for analyzing metaphor within literary texts may appear cut and dry, the complexity and fluidity of metaphorical language demands that any analysis of metaphor remain flexible and heuristic. In this vein, although the following presents the method in terms of linear steps, in numerous instances not all tasks are necessary and many times certain tasks may be performed at the same time or in a different order. Furthermore, it is important to note that this method is not intended to assess or theorize about the ways in which a text’s metaphors produce meaning in the minds of its author(s) or audience. Rather, through employing the tools given to us through conceptual metaphor theory, we intend to examine some of the different ways metaphors are constructed in the text and the ways in which they produce and delimit meaning.

1. **Identification of a Metaphorical Expression.** The first step which Steen suggests when analyzing metaphor within a literary text or a unit of text entails identifying the components of the metaphorical expression. This involves the inter-related tasks of identifying the focus and frame of the expression.

   a. **Identifying the “Focus.”** As described in our discussion of Max Black, a metaphor’s “focus” is that which is used to describe or refer to another thing or concept. The focus is the lexical term or phrase which an author uses to describe another concept or term. Even though identifying the focus may sound like a simple task, the matter is complicated by the fact that few metaphorical expressions, especially those in literature, take a propositional form of “a is b.” Instead, metaphorical expressions and their foci may be manifest through different grammatical forms. For example, a metaphor’s focus may be expressed in a verb, such as “she’s moving forward in her studies,” or a metaphor’s focus may be expressed through a noun, “she’s on the right path now.”

   b. **Identifying the “Frame.”** Identifying the focus of a metaphorical expression involves
attention to the expression’s frame, which may signal the metaphorical or non-literal nature of the focus term or terms. The “frame” describes the lexical terms and grammatical structures that surround the focus. For instance, in the above example, “she’s . . . forward in her studies” could be understood as the frame, as the verb “moving” could be understood as the metaphor’s focus which is used to describe making progress or not. However, complicating the process of identifying metaphorical expressions is the fact that the distinction between focus and frame is, as Cameron explains, sometimes “fuzzy.” In this example, it is possible to include “forward” as part of the focus or as part of the frame. The metaphorical expression could be either “progressing is moving forward” or “progressing is moving.” In many instances, such as this, it is difficult to delineate the focus from the frame as they are grammatically intertwined.

The terms and constructions that comprise the frame often indicate that the focus is not to be taken literally, as doing so would be nonsensical. To draw upon the language of Paul Ricoeur, within certain metaphorical expressions the interaction between the focus and the frame result in “semantic impertinence.”

The third chapter of Revelation provides an example of this semantic impertinence within a metaphor expression. In 3:16 John describes the risen Christ using a metaphorical expression as threat toward the people of the church in Laodicea: “I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Putting aside the issue of the personification of a deity, which is itself a metaphorical move, one might assume that the verb, “to spit,” functions as the focus of the metaphorical expression; for, the notion of spitting out people (“you” or the Laodiceans) is literally absurd. For example, in his comments upon Rev 3:16, Aune analyzes the verb in this statement, which he translates as “to vomit.” Drawing upon OT parallels, he suggests that this verb functions as a “figure of speech” (a metaphor?) to describe the possibility of “utter rejection.” However, spitting something out of one’s mouth or vomiting functions literally as a form of rejection, suggesting that the verb is not be the metaphor’s focus in this instance. It is only when one reads or applies this verb to people that the expression as a whole functions metaphorically. This suggests that the focus of the metaphorical expression in this verse is “you” and not “to spit out.” Instead, “to spit out . . . of my mouth” serves as the frame of our metaphorical expression.

c. Metaphors with a Literal Relationship between the Focus and Frame. As we mentioned above, metaphor resists following logical patterns. In many metaphorical expressions the focus and frame do not create an obvious tension or a semantic impertinence. In certain metaphorical expressions the focus may actually “exhibit a literal relation to the frame.”

Taken literally, the expression could make sense. For example, shortly after the threat to the Laodiceans mentioned above, the risen Christ tells them, “. . . I counsel you to buy from me gold
refined by fire” (3:18). Out of context, this statement makes literal sense: Christ could be, in theory, instructing the Laodiceans to purchase actual pure gold. It is only when read in relation to the expression’s context, in which the Laodiceans are chastised for their confidence in wealth (3:17) and told to acquire/put on other metaphorical items (e.g. white robes and eye salve), that the non-literal or metaphorical nature of the expression becomes evident.

When identifying metaphorical expressions in which the frame coheres logically with the focus, one must infer that a focus refers to something other than itself. Identifying and describing these overlaps with the second task in identifying metaphorical expressions in general--metaphorical idea identification.

2. Identification of the Metaphorical Idea. Identifying the “idea” of the metaphorical expression involves naming and describing that concept or thing to which the focus refers. The idea or referent of the metaphorical expression may be either explicit or implicit.

a. Explicit Referents. A referent may be designated within the metaphorical expression, as in propositional metaphors (A is B). These sorts of metaphorical expressions are explicit. However, as we well know, many literary texts avoid such pedantic metaphorical expressions. Instead, as we will see in Revelation, the referent is either mentioned outside of the metaphorical expression itself or the referent must be inferred by the audience.

b. Co-Textual Implicit Referents. A metaphor’s referent may be co-textual, explicit within the text although not within the metaphor clause. The referent can be expressed in a clause adjacent to the metaphorical expression or it can be introduced much earlier within a text. In such an instance, the audience is required to “carry” the referent or target domain, mentioned elsewhere in a text or discourse, to the subject domain.

c. Contextual Implicit Referents. It is also common for a metaphor’s referent to be contextual, evident only through inferences made by virtue of some knowledge apart from the text itself. Contextual metaphors require an interpreter to infer the referent by employing “one’s knowledge of conventional language use and the world.” Although the referent is not named, certain lexical markers (words and phrases) may signal the nature of the referent.

Quite often in Revelation inter-textual allusions, references to various texts and traditions outside of Revelation itself, signal the reader or audience to approach certain terms as metaphorical. These expressions seemingly reflect the assumption that the audience and author share a large body of cultural and religious knowledge, including Hebrew Bible and early Christian traditions. An example of Revelation’s use of contextual metaphors is found in John’s description of the heavenly throne room. Witnessing worship around the throne of God, John describes seeing “a lamb standing though it had been slaughtered” (5:6). While John never
explicitly states “Christ is a lamb,” various elements of the surrounding text suggest that “Christ” is the referent of the metaphorical expression. Immediately prior to his seeing the lamb, an elder announces the appearance of “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David” (5:5). Both of these terms are Jewish messianic titles. Placing these titles, which are themselves metaphorical, prior to John’s reference to the lamb signals that the lamb in 5:6 is to be read in reference to the Messiah, which early Christians believed to be Jesus Christ. This metaphorical expression requires one to infer the referent through common cultural knowledge.

Identifying the referent, whether it is explicit or implicit, yields a metaphorical proposition “a is b.” The specific metaphorical proposition which results from our second step is not necessarily a conceptual metaphor.

3. Identifying Conceptual Mappings. Conceptual metaphor theorists argue that linguistic metaphorical expressions reflect pre-linguistic metaphorical mappings. Individuals use image schemata, general patterns of concrete things and/or events, to conceive of more abstract ideas or experiences. As Aristotle suggests, we use one thing to “see” something else: We use the network of ideas and relationships of a particular image schema, the source domain, in order to understand and organize the components of another domain, the target domain. While this happens on a general level, utilizing culturally communicated image schemata or domains, the linguistic expressions of these conceptual metaphors are often more specific.

a. Identifying Conceptual Domains. Since our analysis of metaphor in Revelation requires us to begin with specific metaphorical expressions within the text, it is necessary to explore whether or not the terms within the specific metaphorical propositions we identify in the text reflect more general domains. In order to do this, we inquire as to whether or not either or both of the components of the metaphorical proposition are specific manifestations of a more general category or domain. This requires not only familiarity with the language of the text, but also knowledge of the culture from which the text ensues. What are the categories or domains with which particular things identified with? In some instances the domains appear obvious. Lamps and torches clearly should be understood as specific examples of the more general domain LIGHT SOURCE. Other items and corresponding lexical terms prove more difficult to relate to or place within a general domain. For instance, do stars and the sun function as part of the LIGHT SOURCE domain or as a part of a domain named CELESTIAL BODIES? In cases such as this, it is important to remember that conceptual domains are themselves constructions, having fluid boundaries and overlapping one another. Thus, in the case of stars and the sun we might conclude that giving off light functions as part of Revelation’s understanding of the domain CELESTIAL BODIES.
In many cases knowledge of the text’s cultural context is necessary in order to fill out the
different components and relationships within a particular domain. Returning to the image of the
lamb introduced in Revelation 5, one can ask, first of all, whether LAMB/ SHEEP itself qualifies
as a domain or whether the conceptual mapping is better understood as ANIMAL. One might
even ask whether or not in Revelation’s cultural setting, which is urban Asia Minor, lamb might
be better understood as part of the domain FOOD. These issues are settled by looking to the
cultural context of Revelation, including not only urban Asia Minor, but also Jewish textual and
religious traditions, upon which John draws heavily. In a full analysis of this metaphorical
expression, it is likely that we would conclude that the domain ANIMAL is most appropriate, as
it can contain the concept of LAMB/ SHEEP and relate to the domain FOOD, since animals in
this culture animals are typically food sources. Likewise, we would probably also conclude that
ANIMAL is an appropriate domain, since it can also contain the related idea of SACRIFICIAL
OBJECT, which is important within Jewish cultic traditions.

b. Reconstructing Metaphorical Mappings. As early as Aristotle, theorists have claimed
that metaphor involves seeing and creating similarities between dis-similar things or ideas. In
his method for analyzing metaphor, Steen suggests that it is necessary to reconstruct these
conceptual mappings or analogies implicit within metaphorical expressions. This initially
involves naming the mapping or conceptual metaphor, such as CHRIST IS AN
ANIMAL/LAMB.

Reconstructing the metaphorical mapping also requires us to begin to ask questions about
what it means to see one idea or thing in terms of another domain. What aspects of the source
domain, which concepts and relationships within this domain, are mapped on to the target? As
Black argues, semantic domains are “networks of associated commonplaces;” however, in
metaphorical mappings specific aspects of the source domain may be applied to the target
domain. As a result, not only is it necessary to develop some idea of the complexity of different
domains, but it is also important to examine how each individual mapping draws upon and
recasts the domains it encompasses.

When authors cast a conceptual mapping in specific lexical terms and set it within a
linguistic frame, they naturally highlight certain aspects of the complex conceptual domains
underlying the expression. It is not enough to simply identify the conceptual mappings behind
the text. The tendency to stop with identifying conceptual metaphors is one of the major
criticisms of conceptual metaphor theory. Thus, for a complete analysis it is necessary to return
to the linguistic expression to observe how within this particular expression the metaphorical
mapping is being employed.
Returning to the lamb in Rev 5, by using the lexical term “lamb” as the focus of the metaphorical expression, John highlights particular aspects of the ANIMAL domain: Christ is an animal having characteristics typically associated with lambs. In addition, by placing this focus in a lexical frame that refers to the lamb being slaughtered John emphasizes a certain aspect of the domain ANIMAL, namely the possibility that an animal functions as a sacrifice. This is not to suggest that other aspects of the domain ANIMAL and, more specifically, the concept of LAMB do not come into play when John introduces the metaphor; rather, other aspects of the domain naturally do adhere to the metaphorical expression. How these other aspects of the domain are incorporated into the text and into interpretations of the text depend in large part on the interpreter. This is where metaphor becomes particularly unwieldy, as different interpreters draw upon different aspects of the mapping implied within a metaphorical expression. Even though an author may try to delimit meaning within a metaphorical expression, by introducing a particular conceptual mapping he or she invites the audience to imagine a variety of different meanings. This is one of the reasons why analysis of a particular metaphorical complex benefits from attention to how the complex is appropriated and interpreted by different readers.

4. Conceptual Blends. While metaphorical mappings in their most basic form involve projecting a source domain onto a target domain, mappings can be related in more complex ways. In many literary texts, as well as everyday language, different conceptual domains can be “blended” to create new or different conceptual domains. Often this takes the form of a target influencing one another. This happens quite often with personification and animal imagery in fables and such. For example, in fables an animal character often possesses human characteristics (e.g. the abilities to speak and reason) in order to communicate something about human behavior. In these instances, the animal is not strictly speaking the source domain for a metaphorical mapping with a human as the target domain; instead, characteristics of both domains, animal and human, are blended to metaphorically depict human behavior.  

Throughout Revelation it is possible to identify possible conceptual blends, including quite complex constructions. In Revelation, as well as other fantastic texts, not only do conceptual blends occur when aspects of source and target domains are blended into one, but also when various domains function as sources in creating a new domain in order to describe a particular target. One of the most prominent blends in the text is the heavenly throne room, initially described in Rev 4. John’s description of this space blends, among other things, aspects of an earthly throne room, including a variety of political symbols (e.g. elders, thrones, crowns), with celestial realities (e.g. thunder and lightning) creating “God’s space.” In the text, the description of the heavenly throne room does not necessarily function as an end in itself. Rather,
the heavenly throne room seemingly describes the character of its chief resident—“the one who sits upon the throne” or God. This reflects a basic conceptual mapping STATES/CHARACTERISTICS ARE OBJECTS. The different objects in the heavenly throne room describe metaphorically the different characteristics of the divine. In this way, John, like many before him, describes a blended space in order to depict the indescribable.

Through this exploration of how metaphorical language has been understood and approached throughout the Western literary and rhetorical traditions, we have seen how metaphor has been described as a tool of persuasion and as a purely ornamental device. The latter characterization, which grows out of the delineation of tropes in the Latin rhetorical tradition, has contributed to the denigration of metaphorical and figurative language in some strands of Western philosophy. This tendency to scorn metaphor reflects the assumption that words function as signs, pointing directly or, in the case of metaphors, indirectly to what they signify. In this view, metaphors are at best creative ways of signifying concepts and at worst words misused for the sake of style.

Contemporary theories of metaphor generally have sought to emphasize the connection between metaphor and thought, an ancient idea that seems to have been lost in later discussions of metaphor. Conceptual metaphor theorists in particular have worked to underscore how metaphor, including metaphorical expressions in literary texts, bring ideas “before the eyes.” Drawing upon the insights of conceptual metaphor theory, especially as articulated by Steen, we turn now to an exploration of how Revelation redeploy traditional metaphorical mappings within its own historical context as a means of shaping the ways its audience conceptualizes its identity and its relationship to Christ.

1Most notable is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who relates Revelation’s evocative and rhetorical power to the text’s figurative language. Her important work on the text sets the stage for even closer attention to specific metaphors and figures within the text, Schüssler Fiorenza, “Visionary Rhetoric and Social Political Situation,” in The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 181-203. See also, for example, David L. Barr, Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1998).

2Mark Turner contrasts modern literary theorists and scholars of metaphor to the classical tradition, namely Aristotle, arguing that the former fail to recognize the cognitive aspect of metaphorical language, which is something the classical theorists assume, Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3-9.


4Raymond Gibbs treats Aristotle under the “Traditional View” of metaphor, with which he clearly disagrees. Among other things, Gibbs suggests that Aristotle’s work leads to the view that metaphor is a

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9Mahon, “Getting Your Sources Right,” 72-73.

10Turner, *Death is the Mother of Beauty*, 3. Turner, unlike some of his contemporaries, highlights Aristotle’s understanding of metaphor, suggesting that the ancient philosopher not only recognizes the persuasive aspect of metaphor, but also begins to explore the connection between cognition and language.


12Kennedy suggests that during the Greco-Roman period there is little or no differentiation between rhetorical theory and literary criticism. Generally, the prescriptive texts of the rhetoricians reflected and provided the framework through which literature was discussed and understood, George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 159.

13The tradition of criticizing orators stems back to Plato’s *Gorgias* and continues, most notably, in the works of Tacitus. Tacitus’ criticism of the rhetorical schools is often thought to describe the general decline of the rhetorical traditions in the 2nd century; however, his criticism also attests to the fact that rhetorical training was still popular during this time period. See Tacitus, *Dialogus de Ortoribus* xxxv.

Murphy notes that Cicero’s works were translated into vernacular languages, including Italian and French. Further, a number of medieval scholars wrote commentaries on the works of Cicero, attesting to the significance of Cicero’s works for the Middle Ages. For example, Thierry of Chartres wrote a commentary on De Inventione in the 12th century. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 106.


E.g. *De or.* III.xl.161. The text of *De Oratore* includes a sentence explaining the difference between a metaphor and simile, which the editor of the text believes to be an interpolation! See Rackham’s translation, in the Loeb Classical Library, of Cicero *De or.*, III.xxxix.157.


*Contra* Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 8. While not addressing metaphor in particular, Murphy characterizes the Roman rhetorical tradition, including *ad Herennium* and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* as homogenous.


Augustine, *Confessions* IV.iv.2.

*De doctrina christiana* was composed in two different stages. The first three books were written about 396 C.E., shortly after Augustine was ordained as the Bishop of Hippo. The final book was added in 426. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, 178.


For a discussion of how *De doctrina christiana* resembles and relates to other ancient grammatical texts in particular, see Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, 178-189.

Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* responds to a context of debate over the question of whether or not it was appropriate for Christians to study the works of secular or “pagan” authors. Likewise, Christian scholars argued over the appropriateness of learning and using rhetorical techniques in order to preach the Christian message. Jerome, writing in 384 C.E., captures the sense of this debate in his famous quotation, “What has Horace to do with the Psalter, Virgil with the Gospels, and Cicero with Paul?” See *Select Letters of Jerome* (trans. F.A. Wright; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1933), XXII.29.


Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*, 81-82.


In the introduction to his translation of Augustine’s works on Genesis, Roland J. Teske notes that Augustine’s language about interpreting Scripture “seems lacking in fixity and precision with different sets of terms that overlap and are remarkably resistant to a systematic presentation.” Further, he notes, that Augustine’s views on interpretation may change over time, further demonstrating the fluidity of these interpretive categories for Augustine.


Quoted in Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2.35.

Quoted in Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2.35.


Irvine persuasively argues that the study of grammar during the medieval period produced a unique textual culture which had far-reaching effects, including social and political effects. See Irvine, *The Making of Textural Culture*, 1-39.

Irvine, *The Making of Textural Culture*, 212. The influence of Isidore’s discussion of grammar is seen, for example, in Hugh of St. Victor’s suggestion that *Etymologies* be consulted on grammar, along with the works of Donatus, Priscian and others. He offers this suggestion in *Didascalicon*, written in the late 1120's, which provides an introduction and outline to the subjects studied at the school founded as part of the Abbey of St. Victor. Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts* (trans. Jerome Taylor; N.Y.: Columbia UP, 1961), II.29.

Irvine argues that Isidore’s discussion of figures and tropes reflects a lost, specifically Christian, version of Donatus’ grammatical text. This version appears to be partially preserved in other texts, Irvine, *The Making of Textural Culture*, 226-27.

These categories of different types of metaphor are also outlined by Quintilian, *Inst*. VIII.vi.9ff.

Irvine argues that *De Schematibus et Tropis* is often misclassified as a rhetorical work, when it clearly functions as a guide for the interpretation of Scripture and not as a guide for constructing an original work. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, 292.

Bede, *De Schematibus* II.i.


Alberic, *Flores*, 146-47.


One of the most noted and influential scholars of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, exhibits and perpetuates disapproval of figurative language. Aquinas’ dislike of figurative interpretation of the biblical texts is well known. Even though he recognizes that the use of symbolical language in Scripture, in contrast to poetry, is effective and necessary, he emphasizes the importance of the literal reading of Scripture. Beryl Smalley explains that Aquinas’ understanding of the literal/historical sense of Scripture includes the intended meaning behind figurative language. That is, the meaning of figurative language is the literal meaning to which it points, Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 300-02.

Cameron argues that this is actually a twentieth century phenomenon, as a more cognitive understanding of metaphor is expressed in some seventeenth and eighteenth century works. The purpose of the current discussion is not to offer a study on the historical development of theories of metaphor for its own sake. Rather, by sketching out the history in broad strokes we can see the importance of appropriating conceptual theories of metaphor in our interpretation of Revelation. See Cameron, “Operationalising ‘Metaphor,’” 9.


Cohen, “Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy,” 3.


Turner, *Death is the Mother of Beauty*, 8-11.

For reference to the influence of this essay upon the scholarly discussion about metaphor see Cohen,
“Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy,” 3.


60 Black, “Metaphor,” 280.

61 Black, “Metaphor,” 281, n.11.

62 For an example of the substitution view of metaphor, see John R. Searle, “Metaphor,” 83-111. John Searle provides an example of the substitution approach to metaphor, placing it within the context of speech-act theory. In so doing, Searle maintains that metaphor entails a locution (a speech-act) in which the speaker says one thing, but means another. As such, metaphor can be described as occurring when an individual says “S is P,” but means “S is R.” In this way, metaphor is fundamentally a substitution of terms–one predicate is substituted for another.

The metaphorical act of substitution involves a departure from conventional word usage in such a way that the truth conditions of the statement do not correspond to the literal meaning of the statement. This is to say, the metaphorical utterance is an obvious falsehood or semantically nonsensical. Therefore, the utterance is meaningless within the context of the speech act, unless it refers to another set of truth conditions. For example, on one level the utterance “Sally is a block of ice,” to use one of Searle’s examples, is semantically meaningless. Sally, as a human female, cannot possess the qualities of ice—frozen water molecules. This semantically defective utterance suggests to the audience, according to Searle, that the speaker must be referring to a separate set of truth conditions, in which the claim “Sally is a block of ice” is somehow meaningful.


64 Black, “Metaphor,” 284

65 Black, “Metaphor,” 285. This, in my estimation, echoes Aristotle’s claim that metaphor requires one to be able see similarities between different things. See above.

66 Black, *Models*, 39-40. Black’s terminology in *Models and Metaphors* is somewhat vague at points, as it changes mid-way through the discussion of the interactionist view of metaphor. While he begins using the terms “focus” and “frame” to describe metaphor, he shifts to the language of “primary” and “secondary” subjects.


69 This reflects a major theme in Ricoeur’s work, that words mean in the context of a sentence and that, subsequently, a sentence is not reducible to the sum of its parts. This claim undergirds Ricoeur’s emphasis upon the discipline of semantics over and against semiotics. See Ricoeur, “Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language,” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (ed. Mario J. Valdés; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 69.


Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 74-75. Ricoeur argues that metaphor, as discourse, actually has a dialectical reference that refers both to something beyond the text and to the speaker of the text.


Ricoeur, “Word, Polysemy, Metaphor,” 82.


Turner, *Death is the Mother of Beauty*, 4.


Turner, *Death is the Mother of Beauty*, 7-8.

A significant challenge to conceptual metaphor theory is offered by cultural anthropologist Naomi Quinn. Investigating the ways in which U.S. Americans describe marriage, Quinn explores the relationship between conceptual metaphors and models and cultural assumptions and predilections. Quinn argues, against conceptual metaphor theorists, that metaphorical mappings are the product of cultural models and not *vice versa*. While conceptual metaphor theorists seemingly suggest that cultural models of understanding are constrained by metaphorical mappings, metaphorical mappings are actually selected on the basis of pre-existing models for understanding particular phenomena. For instance, common
marriage metaphors, such as descriptions of marriage as a journey, are employed because they fit with pre-conceived ideas about marriage, i.e. that marriage endures and involves difficulties. Further, Quinn argues that metaphorical mappings do not constrain reasoning about the abstract, even though they may be involved in reasoning about something abstract. If, for example, an individual’s reasoning about marriage can no longer be described by a journey metaphor, the individual will often change to another metaphorical description of marriage, such as MARRIAGE IS AN OBJECT. Thus, Quinn concludes that the metaphors are secondary in the reasoning process and do not necessarily shape the ways in which individuals reason about the abstract.

Even though Quinn challenges conceptual metaphor theory, she does not call into question the existence of basic conceptual metaphors or metaphorical mappings. In the most simple terms, the debate between Quinn and conceptual metaphor theory revolves around which comes first, cultural ways of understanding of abstract concepts or the metaphorical ways of conceiving of abstract concepts. While this is an important question, it has little impact on the claim of this dissertation, that certain metaphorical mappings lay behind more specific textual metaphors, Quinn, “The Cultural Basis of Metaphor,” 56-93 and Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 137ff.


87Within the publications of conceptual metaphor theory, it is standard to describe the mappings of basic conceptual metaphors in all upper-case letters, while individual expressions of the conceptual metaphors are printed in lower-case letters. For the sake of clarity, I will adopt this method of reference throughout this dissertation.

88Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 13.

89Donald Schöhn describes an interesting example of the ability of conceptual metaphors to generate new ways of thinking and acting. Looking at how urban housing has been described in U.S. social policy, Schöhn observes that the metaphors used to envision urban housing contribute to how problems with urban housing are handled. For instance, conceiving of urban housing as an entity with a sickness in need of healing leads to problem solving that involves an outside authority (“the doctor”) analyzing (“diagnosing”) the problem and offering a solution (“the cure”). In contrast, envisioning urban housing as a folk community leads to different ways of describing and solving problems associated with housing. This second metaphorical model, according to Schöhn, involves thinking of ways of “rebuilding” the community and of avoiding the “dislocation” of community members. Schöhn’s analysis demonstrates the power of metaphorical mappings to shape the ways individuals and communities think and speak about as well as act in response to abstract concepts. Donald A. Schöhn, “Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem-Setting in Social Policy,” in Metaphor and Thought (2nd ed.; ed. Andrew Ortony; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 137-63.


91 Only in early 2002 was a journal published that included a number of articles applying Steen’s method to literary texts, as well as articulating the complexities inherent within this method. See *Language and Literature* 11:2 (2002).


94 Cameron, “Operationalising ‘Metaphor,’” 15. The assumption that metaphor appears in this form stems, in part, from the tendency of conceptual metaphor theorists to use the propositional form of denotation.


101 Following the tradition in conceptual metaphor theory, linguistic metaphorical expressions will be written in lower case letters (a is b) and conceptual metaphors or mappings will be written in capitals (A IS B).

102 Steen, “From a Linguistic to Conceptual Metaphor,” 66. Many analyses of metaphor investigate metaphors and metaphorical expressions move from these generalized domains and then identify metaphorical expressions that draw upon a particular domain; rather than beginning with specific metaphorical expressions within a text and identifying the underlying conceptual mappings and domains.

103 In fact, the use of the word “domain” is metaphorical: A CONCEPT IS A PIECE OF LAND.

104 For a discussion of conceptual blends especially as they are used in fables see Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind* (N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1996), 57-84.