

JAVIER FERNÁNDEZ-SEBASTIÁN: *Key metaphors for History: Mirrors of time*, London and New York, Routledge, 2024, XII + 338 pages.

What role do metaphors play in shaping historical inquiry? Why and how do historians rely on metaphors in their research, analyses, and narratives? What is the relationship between figurative language and conceptual knowledge in historiographical practice? These fundamental questions lie at the core of *Key Metaphors for History: Mirrors of Time* (2024), the latest book by Javier Fernández-Sebastián.

The volume emphasizes the irreplaceable heuristic function of metaphors in our intellectual life, offering a compelling overview of “those tropes and central metaphorical crossroads” (14) that have shaped major epistemological debates among professional historians, particularly over the past two centuries in the West. Yet, Fernández-Sebastián’s investigation extends well beyond this scope, engaging with classical, medieval, and early modern traditions, while incorporating also extra-European perspectives and examining a wide range of prominent philosophers, politicians, and novelists. As a result, the book provides readers with a richly textured account of the “history of the main historiographical metaphors” (4), tracing connections, continuities, and ruptures both diachronically and synchronically.

From a methodological standpoint, Fernández-Sebastián navigates between Blumenbergian metaphorology and Koselleck’s *Begriffsgeschichte*. Concepts, he contends, are essential yet never sufficient “for linguistic comprehension of the realities in which we live” (6). Beneath conceptual knowledge, there always lies a preconceptual substratum where metaphors—from μεταφέρω, *to carry over*—play a crucial role in rendering otherwise abstract and elusive phenomena intelligible. Furthermore, numerous concepts are deliberately (re)metaphorized by scholars and politicians to enhance their vividness and strength. This is why there are no insurmountable barriers between concepts and metaphors. Conversely, there exists a mutual relationship generating “an abundance of intermediate states of crystallization,” such as “conceptual metaphors” and “metaphorical concepts” (3). Moreover, the processes of metaphorization and conceptualization are continuous and reciprocal, constantly subject to reversals and reconfigurations. The book’s structure reflects precisely this

dynamic interplay: it is divided into two large interconnected blocks—*Conceptual metaphors for history* and *Metaphorical concepts in historiography*—followed by a brief synthesis of *Final thoughts*.

The first part (comprising three chapters: “Metaphorizing history”, “Time and memory”, and “Pasts, presents, and futures”) analyzes the conceptual metaphors used to represent “the substance of history and the tasks of the historian” (21), with special attention to the figurative articulation of time in historiography and public discourse. History emerges both as a discipline reflexively probing the epistemic status of its claims, and as a never-ending meditation on the dialectical nexus between past, present, and future. Consequently, Fernández-Sebastián traverses the *vexata quaestio* of historical *truth* and the tropes shaping the relationship between our “space of experience” and our *horizon of expectation*.

The discussion follows a broad and intricate trajectory, spanning from Cicero’s classical metaphors of *historia magistra vitae* and *lux veritatis* to the *cracked mirrors* of postmodernism and the *crepuscular lights* of the Anthropocene. Building on Koselleck, Fernández-Sebastián identifies a decisive turning point in the *Sattelzeit*, when the American and French revolutions fostered images of time as a *train*, *river*, or *arrow* teleologically oriented toward an end. While traditional iconography depicted Clio, the muse of history, as a seated woman writing on the back of Father Time, modernity set her body in motion, advancing toward brighter horizons (36-38).

However, Fernández-Sebastián argues that a “black cloud of pessimism” emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, spreading across Europe after the First World War (45). Nietzsche and Benjamin served as the “great destroyer[s] of metaphors and prolific creator[s] of counter-metaphors” (49). Nietzsche attacked the quasi-theological conception of history, reacting against Ranke’s dictum *zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen* and asserting that “there are no facts, only interpretations”. Benjamin dismantled the orthodox Marxist vision of progress, and portrayed history as an endless accumulation of catastrophes in which revolutions serve not as “locomotives” but as “emergency brakes”. Together, their tropes marked another pivotal change in the history of historiography, namely the rise of anti-historicism, paving the way for contemporary disorientation and the current “superabundance of methodological twists and turns” (273).

A central strength of the book, I would argue, lies in its ability to avoid oversimplification. While emphasizing the salience of paradigm shifts, the author resists the pitfall of a unilinear historical reconstruction, reminding readers of the potential co-presence of contrasting metaphors within any given temporal span. For instance, by shifting the analytical lens toward

underexplored geographical, ideological, and political contexts, it becomes clear that didactic and normative interpretations of history as *magistra* were never fully abandoned—“not even during the French Revolution, or at other moments of rupture”—and have continued, in various guises, to be invoked up to the present day (35-36).

This intriguing dimension of the book reappears in its second part, which examines “a number of concepts and categories to which historians regularly recur for research and for the writing of history” (135), including both “some *termini technici* central to the discipline” (*sources, events, process, transition*) and “instrumental notions typical of modernity” (*revolution, crisis, progress, decline*) (4). The author outlines the “intrinsically metaphorical origin and structure” of this “conceptual *outillage*” (135), but never lapses into trivialization.

While reconstructing the history of the metaphorical concept of progress, for example, Fernández-Sebastián adopts a two-pronged approach. He acknowledges semantic and figurative shifts during the *Sattelzeit*, but distances himself from scholars who have “flatly denied that there was any hint of progress in antiquity” (219). The author maintains that pre-modern times were not purely declinist: “in the minds of celebrated thinkers and *literati*, ideas of both advancement and degeneration could perfectly well coexist” (219-220).

The multifaceted history of the concept of progress is likewise evident in the twentieth century. After the First World War, many European intellectuals challenged the modern faith in progressive *Geschichtsphilosophie*. Western imagery was filled with metaphors such as “the coming of autumn”, “the setting of the sun”, and the civilizational “decrepitude” (232). Nevertheless, in 1920s Russia, “the train of socialism” still raced “full steam ahead toward the radiant communist future” (227), and Soviet tropological discourses consistently drew on *railways, boats, and sunrises*. After all, a pluriverse of competing metaphors persists even today: “the gloomy language of decline is much more in vogue lately than the glittering language of progress” (239), but the latter endures in political debates about *sustainability* and *human development*.

Ultimately, the book constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary historiography, by clarifying core epistemological knots and dismantling long-standing prejudices that pit scientific rigor against figurative language and tropological tools. The breadth of the subject may leave readers wishing for greater depth: as Fernández-Sebastián rightly points out, “the topic is inexhaustible” (4), and the inevitable limitation of a book ranging so widely is that some topics are at times not as fully developed as one might wish.

Nonetheless, the author handles this complex subject with nuance and precision, elegantly revealing “the metaphorical bases of discourses about history, as well as the categorical apparatus upon which the discipline has historically been built” (259). The result is a work of clear interdisciplinary relevance, capable of engaging a diverse readership and stimulating reflection not only on the origins of “the conceptual pillars that support the edifice of history” (281), but also on the pivotal role of tropological imagination in our efforts to make sense of the present and envision the future.

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ALEJANDRO BAER: *Antisemitismo. El eterno retorno de la cuestión judía*, Los Libros de la Catarata, Madrid, 2025, 176 págs.

«Como alteridad contrapuesta y amenazante, el judío ha desempeñado un papel en los imaginarios políticos y culturales que superaron con creces la presencia cuantitativa de esta minoría en las respectivas sociedades que ha habitado. La cuestión judía es, por tanto, la cuestión del antisemitismo» (p. 9). Con esta máxima, Alejandro Baer, quien es sociólogo, investigador en el Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas y exdirector del Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies de la Universidad de Minnesota, da comienzo a su nuevo libro titulado *Antisemitismo. El eterno retorno de la cuestión judía*.

Baer estructura su índice en siete apartados que abarcan el antijudaísmo religioso en el mundo árabe y cristiano, el proceso de secularización judío y su integración forzada en el Estado, la construcción de los discursos antisemitas a finales del siglo XIX e inicios del XX, y cómo estos alcanzan su punto más álgido en el Holocausto. También es foco de su atención la evolución del odio político y racial antisemita en Oriente Medio y cómo este se vincula a los movimientos «libertarios» de manera consciente o inconsciente. Entre todos los epígrafes, llaman poderosamente la atención aquellos dedicados al antisemitismo en los centros universitarios españoles. El clima de crispación y de odio en los espacios de enseñanza superior ha ido en aumento en los últimos años, desde octubre de 2023, provocando ataques físicos y verbales sobre israelíes, judíos y no judíos. El trabajo de Baer sería el primero en incluir este tipo de estudio en nuestro país y en este formato, lo cual merece ser destacado.

Entre sus objetivos, el autor de este trabajo busca introducir al lector en las diferentes fases históricas del antijudaísmo y del antisemitismo, la variación