CHAPTER FIVE

METAPHOR AND OTHER TROPES

I. INTRODUCTION TO 2 SAMUEL 16:16–17:14

Following the encounter between David and Abigail in Carmel, David continues to solidify his power base, and he eventually succeeds Saul as king (2 Samuel 5). Shortly thereafter, the focus of the narrative shifts from warfare and political in-fighting to domestic dramas: David’s affair with Bathsheba and its deadly aftermath (2 Samuel 11–12), the rape of David’s daughter, Tamar, by her half-brother, Amnon (2 Sam 13:1–22), the vengeful murder of Amnon by his half-brother, Absalom (2 Sam 13:23–33), and a familial coup d’état after Absalom “stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Sam 15:6) and usurped the throne from his father (2 Sam 15:7–12). As the deposed king flees from Jerusalem, David encounters a series of individuals, including Hushai the Archite. After learning that his trusted advisor, Ahitophel, has joined Absalom in the conspiracy, David enlists Hushai to return to Jerusalem and infiltrate the royal court: “If you cross over with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘Your servant will I be, O king, I was your father’s servant, and now I will be your servant,’ you can subvert Ahitophel’s counsel for me” (2 Sam 15:33–34). Hushai adeptly fulfills his mission by employing numerous rhetorical techniques to influence Absalom and his supporters.

Because of the rhetorical richness of the confrontation between Ahitophel and Hushai, 2 Sam 16:16–17:14 provides an apt setting for the continued study of metaphor in biblical prose narrative. Whereas the prior chapters of this study concentrated on the identification and interpretation of metaphor, the present chapter endeavors to better understand metaphor by comparing it to other tropes, namely metonymy and simile.¹ This section aims to enhance our

¹ From the time of Quintilian through the eighteenth century, writers maintained a strict division between the terms “trope” and “figure.” The term “trope,” which includes metaphor, “is said to involve a provisional change (‘alteration’ or ‘turning’).
insight into how metaphor operates by exploring the elements it shares with other forms of figurative language and the facets that make it unique.

II. Metaphor and Metonymy in 2 Samuel 16:16–17:14

A. Research Review: Approaches to Metonymy

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle conflates two tropes under the rubric of “metaphor.” Applying a more precise classification, “the transference of a term . . . from genus to species, species to genus, species to species”\(^2\) describes metonymy, while transference “by analogy” characterizes metaphor. The eclipsing of metonymy by metaphor in Aristotle’s early definition reflects the relationship between these two tropes in subsequent scholarship. Hugh Bredin begins his article “Metonymy” by stating that “one of the distinguishing marks of modern literary culture is the dominance given to metaphor over all the other figures and tropes.”\(^3\) Perplexed by this phenomenon, he observes: “Metonymy may in fact be more common than metaphor . . . yet it is seldom subjected to the detailed and lengthy investigations that metaphor undergoes.”\(^4\) Jonathan Culler addresses this issue as he imagines how delighted “our illustrious forbears in the field of rhetoric,” like Quintilian and Fontanier, would be at the recent renewed interest in rhetoric; yet he wonders how they would react to the imbalanced attention to metaphor. He speculates:

> But they would be puzzled, I believe, at the extraordinary privilege accorded to metaphor. ‘Why metaphor?’ they might ask. Why not organize a symposium on the simile or synecdoche, on metalepsis or meiosis, or on such complex figures as anadiplosis, alloiosis, or antapo-

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\(^4\) Bredin, 45. He adds: “And not only is it not widely studied, but most accounts of it are unsatisfactory.”