THE PARABLES OF JESUS, KAFKA, BORGES, AND OTHERS, WITH STRUCTURAL OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The generic trajectory of parable is charted in the dream-stories of Kafka which dislocate time, place, and story itself, in the mirror-stories of Borges which do all this and then recreate their own author and all other authors as well, and in modern American authors, such as Hawkes, Barthelme, and Coover, who use parabolic contents and forms in their struggle with the literary past. Parable creates the future as the parabler joins other artists in standing at the edge of the possible, image-ing the future/the possible in diction that then becomes the way the future/the possible is experienced. Among the characteristics of parabolic stories are (sur/super) realism, reversal of expectation, humor, universality, non-application (?), mystery, and an interlocking of speaker and hearer. Jesus' parables are to be analyzed along this trajectory and not in isolation. Special note is taken of the reversal element in these stories although this may be constitutive of only one type of parable.

INTRODUCTION

0.1 "Parable" did not cease with Jesuanic parables, nor did it originate there. Kafka and Borges have been identified by many critics as parablers, and the first part of the paper explores aspects of their work (and that of other recent parablers) and possible interconnections. Several features of "parables in general" are highlighted as specially relevant in comparative study.

0.2 + For publication in this journal, this paper remains substantially the same as in SBL Seminar Papers, 1973. Added paragraphs are marked, as is this one, by a + sign; added bibliography is not so marked. While I am

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especially grateful to Seminar participants for their written and oral critiques, it has not been possible to incorporate all their suggestions, nor have I been able to expand the paper as I hope to do, to discuss the literary analysis of parables, parables as "stories," the interior: exterior relationship of reversal and the comic/ironic aspects, or to analyze in detail—including structuralist analysis— one modern and one Jesuanic parable. In a brief paper ("Parable, Story, and Pedagogy") for CTS and AAR, Niagara Falls, March, 1974, I tried to engage the question of eschaton-entering-language in parable, as well as parable-as-story, and parabler-as-trickster: these themes, also, will have to find elaboration in a later work.

I. THE ASSEMBLING OF GENERIC FAMILIES

1.1 The introduction of modern writers of fiction in discussions focussed on Jesus' parables is based on two reasons, one directed forward and the other backward. The forward orientation comes from my conviction that we can best comprehend genres or literary performances when we comprehend the literary history to which they give rise. On the one hand we will look toward new works influenced, on the other toward new receptions and new impacts of the materials in new situations (Doty, 1972).

Generic trajectories, further, must be charted. Roger Fowler identifies three main phases: (a) the assembling of the genre-complex, until a formal type emerges from repeated use of several independent motifs together; (b) this pattern is self-consciously used and varied (at this level there is repetition and stereotype in opposition to underlying actual events in the first level); (c) a tertiary phase, which may involve burlesque or an anti­thetic or symbolic modification of the second phase (Fowler: 212).

At any rate: "A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period," (Jauss: 10) and all post-New Criticism critics take into account the variability of
readings in varying chronological and social contexts. Study of the parables of Jesus has been primarily directed to the initial transmissions of the parables by early Christianity, whereas the emphasis in the first part of this paper is upon the wider contours of "parable" as such.

1.2 The backward orientation of the work comes from Borges' article on "Kafka and his Precursors," (Borges, 1965:111-113) especially as developed by Funk (1972) and Monegal (espec. 120f.; see also Belitt: 280f.). Borges highlights the relation between perception and reality: "Kafka's idiosyncracy...is present in each of these writings [Zeno's paradoxes, a Chinese fable, two Kierkegaard parables, stories by Bloy and Dunsany, a poem by Browning], but if Kafka had not written we would not perceive it; that is to say, it would not exist" (Borges, 1965:113).

The point is that literary works may affect our perception of other works to such an extent that the earlier work is read by us through glasses tinted by the later work, and there is probably no escaping this hermeneutical spiral. Hence in this sense Kafka's parables "create" Jesus' parables: meaning that Kafka's parables so influence our comprehension of "parable" that we cannot pretend to read Jesus' parables in a context-free way.

Borges develops the idea further in his later statement in the same article that: "The fact is that each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future" (Borges, 1965:113). And, in fact, an author may be said to create himself insofar as his earlier or later works exist in the framework of his total oeuvres. A writer may be said to assemble his precursors in such a way as to demonstrate affinities not previously noticed; so Funk notes (1972:30):

Kafka's precursors have little in common among themselves; it is only in Kafka that they are brought together, only in him that their affinities come to light. This is because Kafka modified the way we read his precursors; had Kafka not
taught us to read them, we would not know the real tradition to which they belong.

1.3 The task of assembling members of a genre-sharing group of writers is usually assigned to the literary critic, working discursively and analytically. Borges suggests that authors themselves do this task, whether or not intentionally. Genre classification, under this pro-paedeutic role, is intended to alert the reader/interpreter to:

(a) the associational complexes in which a work appears;
(b) its ability to serve the author's intentions and/or the audience's expectations; and
(c) the preperceptions about the type of writing which the interpreter carries forward out of his own context, and which hinder or aid interpretation (Doty, 1972:29).

For Borges, I suspect, such analysis is less interesting as a workbench exercise than as an occasion to identify and enjoy materials that charm him and that are in their own ways constitutive of Borges. His concept of a universal literature in which: "...the identity or plurality of men matters not at all...," seems to demand a personal approach to literature that has its focus upon idiosyncratic enjoyment rather than classification in the elaborately encrusted maps of "Western Classics" /2/.

1.4 Jesus' parables are striking works of art--most analysts could agree--but they do not appear without a context, and this context is their generic family. In this paper I have primarily looked at Jesuanic and modern parables, but a complete study would have to move backwards into parables in the Tanak and the rabbis /3/. Especially if we view Jesus as accosting the view of "world" established in his own day, we need to have before us (a) an understanding of that perception and (b) examples of parabolic moves by his contemporaries, who either confirmed or accosted/reversed it. We also need to ask whether literary
forms are bound, to some degree, to the culture-world in
which they are first articulated (Cf. Jolles: 1958 and

II. KAFKA'S DREAM-LIKE STORIES

2.1 Kafka's parables, having a dream- or nightmare-like
ambience, also have the curiously condensed qualities
of dreams: they begin, and often end, strictly in the
middle of things; actors are most frequently anonymous,
abstract "theys," as in the opening of "Couriers" (Kafka,
1946:175): "They were offered the choice between becoming
kings or the couriers of kings..." /4/. The logics of the
plots are condensed and locked on; "Couriers" continues:

The way children would, they all wanted to be
couriers. Therefore there are only couriers who
hurry about the world, shouting to each other--
since there are no kings--messages that have be-
come meaningless. They would like to put an end
to this miserable life of theirs but they dare
not because of their oaths of service.

What children? Which kings? Or when, where, why?--it is
only the Why? that Kafka engages. "They" are trapped by
decisions made long ago, and by "their oaths of service"
which bind them in the intractable logic of dreams.

2.2 Echoes of The Trial and Amerika crowd in (Kafka
creating Kafka?), especially when we confront this sense
of blind obligation. Kafka himself, in one of the most
direct comments on "the existential fallenness" emphasized
by modern interpreters, concludes "The Great Wall and the
Tower of Babel" with this meditation:

Human nature, essentially changeable, unstable
as the dust, can endure no restraint; if it binds
itself it soon begins to tear madly at its bonds,
until it rends everything asunder, the walls,
the bonds and its very self. (Kafka: 27; cf. the
"chains" in "Paradise," Kafka: 31.)

And in "Diogenes" (Kafka: 95), person C is "terribly
ordered about by B" since he thinks person A has explained
everything to B--but really A has only been told that, not
why. A man lies helpless while a vulture eats his feet
(149); people in a small town submit to orders from the capital (161). A man who has eluded "the first watchman" runs back "horrified" to confess: "I suppose I really oughtn't to have done it..." (81). He still cannot accept his freedom when the watchman is silent, and so he has to ask: "Does your silence indicate permission to pass?" /5/.

2.3 We are given no historical background, and even when some sort of actual referents seems to be implied, as in "The News of the Building of the Wall" (Kafka: 21-22), we are left to construct them as we will or can /6/. In the final story of the collection, "My Destination," Kafka's master knows his destination clearly: but the destination is "Away-From-Here," "...a truly immense journey" that may or may not be a dream. (Compare endings of several stories in which the protagonist falls back into a dream or reverie; "An Imperial Message" [15] ends: "But you sit at your window and dream it to yourself.")

2.4 Time seems similarly unimportant—except as paradoxical time. The messenger in "The News of the Building of the Wall" appears "...late, some thirty years after its announcement"; and the messiah ("The Coming of the Messiah," [81]) "...will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last"—this sounds like an eschatological conjugation of the verb forms of a language to be invented after its use is past.

2.5 If time is handled by paradox, so are other items: many of the stories involve messengers or messages— that either come too late or are not comprehended. In fact a major theme might be identified as communication or non-communication, as in the Tower of Babel stories. The clearest statement is that of "Couriers," already quoted above. The soldiers who terrify the townspeople in one of the longer stories, "The Refusal," "...speak a dialect utterly incomprehensible to us..." (167), and the stones
used in "The Building of the Temple" are inscribed with "...the clumsy scribblings of senseless children's hands, or rather the entries of barbaric mountain dwellers" (47) /7/.

2.6 Incomprehension—and the incomprehended past, traditions still honored even though those handing on the traditions do not know anything more than that the forefathers had originally founded them. Compare the "...ancient traditions that had recommended the place" in "The Building of a City" (105); and most striking of all, the suggestion that accidents shape history and tradition:

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony. (93)

The inexplicable is encountered in "Prometheus," where the final part leaves us (after four versions of the Prometheus myth) with the sheer "inexplicable mass of rock" to which the hero was clamped, and suggests that all the versions fail to deal with the pure facticity of the situation: "The legend tried to explain the inexplicable" (83).

2.7 Paradox and oxymoron (figures of speech in which opposite or contradictory ideas are combined) are part of the center of Kafka's stories, and I will suggest later that an element of reversal is crucial to parables-as-such. Three examples (perhaps the most obvious) show these figures:

(a) the coat of arms of the city that is to be destroyed by five successive blows from a gigantic fist is... a closed fist (37-39);

(b) a tiger, brought to the animal trainer for evaluation of the possibilities of taming it, "...yawned a little, gazed wearily at its new surroundings, and immediately fell asleep" (153);

(c) a dragon, instead of menacing, approaches civilly and offers itself to the man (151).
Two items about the Sirens recompose these familiar stories from Western mythology:

(a) the first has two reversals: it is the silences of the Sirens rather than their singing that is truly compelling—and rather than stressing their appeal to Ulysses, Kafka relates that "...all that they wanted was to hold as long as they could the radiance that fell from Ulysses' great eyes" (91).

(b) the second suggests that the famous songs were not meant as seductive lures, but were the Sirens' wailing laments that they had claws and sterile wombs (93).

Precisely this alteration of traditional stories strikes me as extremely creative: it is the sort of viewing that makes possible new appropriations of our received heritage, and that shows forth the possible alternatives available to the original story tellers. In this sense Kafka recreates his own past. "Abraham" becomes a new figure (41-45), and "Prometheus" is presented in four possible alternatives to his original judgement (83); the marvelous tale of the Krakau rabbi who goes to Prague to find the treasure (that turns out to be buried under his own hearth) is changed by Kafka into a terrifying story of a doorkeeper who guards all too well, shutting the door finally as the seeker is about to die ("Before the Law," [61]).

The use of paradox and reversal of the expected is central to the Kafka parables, and provides one of the key aspects of the structure of many of them. It is this element that I take to be crucial to a number of Jesus' parables as well, and to which I turn in the last part of the paper. First we turn to the magical post-Kafka world of Jorge Luis Borges, in which stories within stories are what the stories are really about.

III. BORGES' STORIES WITHIN STORIES BY A UNIVERSAL AUTHOR

3.1 One apparent problem has to be cleared at the outset, namely Borges' statement in the preface to Doctor
Brodie's Report (1972:x) that:

I want to make it quite clear that I am not, nor have I ever been, what used to be called a preacher of parables or a fabulist and is now known as a committed writer.

If this were strictly true, we should have to say quits. But: (a) note that a section of Labyrinths (1964; one of the first of his works translated into English) is entitled "Parables" (235-249), and (b) Borges is surely referring to the role of the "preacher" or "fabulist" according to one specific definition of parable or fable as moralistic story. He does not state that he does not write parables, but that he does not aim, through his stories, at moral instruction. (He seeks: "...to be entertaining or moving but not persuasive," [1972:x].) Since I too find the "moral tale" aspect of "parable" to be restrictive (see below), I feel it still appropriate to proceed with study of Borges' parables. However, in further qualification, I have to note that I regard the pieces included there to be more on the order of meditations than parables /8/.

3.2 We may begin with mention of the dream theme that initiated discussion of Kafka: Borges' stories not only continue the oneiric quality in their narrations, but expand upon it. And Borges makes the dream into a central figure in his treatment of reality, to the point where he can state that "...after all, writing is nothing more than a guided dream" (1972:xi). Ronald Christ suggests that "Borges and Myself": "...is the successful completion of the priest's endeavor in 'The Circular Ruins.' Borges has managed to dream a man and project him into the real world, and we know it because 'Borges' exists among us" (1972:76). Or, in the author's own questioning reflection: "...which of us is writing this page [the dreamed Borges or the dreamer Borges] I don't know" (1970:99).

Dreams—or reveries. Or imagination. Surely an important "message" from this author who does not wish to be known as a giver-of-messages: the importance of the
imaginative faculty. Barrenechea concludes her book on Borges with reference to "...the creative joy of the author who sees in the imaginings of others as well as in his own the true force capable of overcoming the limitation of the human condition" (145). Wheelock refers to Borges' emphasis upon the re-creative aspects of dreaming: "Like the primitive man's orgiastic return to chaos [i.e., return to chaos as a means of coming into contact with the fecund capacities of the originating matrix of being--as Eliade has chronicled], dreaming is a way of renewing the world" (59) /9/.

Dreams...and mirrors, multiple levels of appearance, and labyrinths: a set of themes for which Borges has great fondness, and a set of factors especially suited to the questioning of the nature of reality evoked in parables. At this point I think especially of Jesus' parables having to do with raising fundamental questions about one's heritage, one's received tradition, and categories of moral/immoral. In many of these parables it seems that the reader is caught up into a dramatic encounter that locks onto his own situation in a way demanding judgment. The judgment demanded most often is a judgment about categories of right and wrong: the unjust steward comes out praised, and one is led to ask about how such categories as just/unjust have come to be. The parable of the Good Samaritan forces a conjunction of "good" + despised outcast = "Samaritan," a pairing of what Jesus' hearers would have considered opposing values.

3.3 Borges works not so much in polar oppositions as in subtle contrasts; he pursues the multiple layers of interpretation and hence of reality as they become sedimented around events. Robert Coover has used a similar technique in Pricksongs & Descants (1969). In "The Babysitter," we experience one story as it is retold by several narrators; in "The Magic Poker," the story starts over and over again in different times and from different vantage points /10/. Lawrence Durrell worked with a
similar layering of interpretations in *The Alexandria Quartet*. In those four novels we are constantly learning of the arbitrariness of perspectives by which the different characters experience their common life; and of course Proust set models for this sort of layering in *The Remembrance of Times Past*.

3.4 The way time is manipulated and its aspects represented is a crucial aspect of fiction. A narrator creates time in which his characters live, and hence time is one aspect of the "narrated world" of the story as opposed to the "reported world" of the news account or of the (secondary) interpretation (cf. Weinrich, 1964). Fabulists have consistently experimented with time, and I wonder if such manipulation of time isn't characteristic not only of fable but also of parable /11/.

At any rate, the manipulation of temporal aspects seems to characterize most narratives by contemporary fiction writers. Borges is one of the clearest exemplars, in so far as he not only develops stories in which temporal horizons cross back and forth /12/ but has explicitly written "A New Refutation of Time" (1964:217-234) /13/. Reality is available to us to the extent that our culture has oriented us to its own definitions of reality; Borges seems to make a similar point about time. Especially in his essays that reconstruct what may have happened in the past, he presses home the observer-oriented aspects of temporal horizons /14/.

3.5 Borges strikes me as a modern parabler, especially in so far as he seeks to reassemble the literary traditions of the past, asking us to review and re-evaluate some traditional literary themes of myth and narrative—part of our sacred traditions. Furthermore, his stories (almost entirely brief and compact) usually manage at some point to break the expectations evoked in us by the primary story line. At times the surprise, "O. Henry" endings were accomplished rather mechanically, and in the Preface to *Doctor Brodie's Report* (1972:xi), he demonstrates his
own resolution to get beyond this mechanism: "I have given up the surprises inherent in a baroque style as well as the surprises that lead to an unforeseen ending. I have, in short, preferred to satisfy an expectation rather than to provide a startling shock." It may be, however, that the "shock" now only comes earlier in the stories, as in the "gothic" tales of Isak Dinesen, since the stories in the most recent volume strike me as distinguished from the earlier stories more by their simplicity of narrative presentation and lack of arcane references than by omission of the reversal-at-the-end (cf. "The End of the Duel," "The Gospel According to Mark," "Juan Mouraño," and "The Meeting," in which a final reversal or disclosure still determines the impact of the story) /15/.

IV. OTHER CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

4.0 The scope of a paper such as this is easily overreached, and my discussion of "others" than Kafka and Borges must be severly compressed. Lacking explicit definition from the outside, I run the risk of advancing personal favorites; nonetheless, we may at least have a few benchmarks, and hope for continued elaboration of the parabolic mode in choices made by others whose sight of the parables ranges more extensively than mine /16/.

4.1 My first candidate would be my favorite among contemporary novelists, John Hawkes, whose novels and plays are too long to qualify as parables /17/. Hawkes writes, however, with an almost overly-sharp attention to the parabolic nature daily events have—when they are recognized as such. Everything sounds all right on the surface (I am often reminded of the plays by Harold Pinter), but the reader is caught up into intermeshing webs of complicity and soon realizes that he has been drawn into a multiform world that has subtle modifications of reality, personhood, and experienced-chronology.

4.2 Donald Barthelme would probably rate as parabler more quickly than Hawkes; several of the short stories in
City Life (1970), Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts (1968), and Come Back, Dr. Caligari (1964), seem almost overly-parabolic. "Paraguay," for instance (1970:19-32), discussed the personal self in terms of the contemporary language of physical objects; this is a mystical land that lays an uneasy coating on our usual perceptions of population and progress. "On Angels" (1970:135-140) seems almost directly inspired by the Prometheus and Don Quixote revisions of Kafka and Borges noted earlier (cf. also "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend"). "Brain Damage" leads to questions about the very nature of "normal" mental health: "...This is quite a nice University you have here. A University constructed entirely of three mile-high sponges!" (1970:153). And "The Glass Mountain" quite unhinges the rescue of the beautiful enchanted princess (as well as the convention of prettiness in such tales: "The sidewalks were full of dogshit in brilliant colors: ocher, umber, Mars yellow, sienna, viridian, ivory black, rose madder" (1970:66). Barthelme's "novel," Snow White (1967) similarly recreates that tale: the heroine has become a pouty lover to six men and the novel ends on a note suggesting the author's clear awareness of the need to reassemble the traditional affects and appearances of the modern novel (181):

THE FAILURE OF SNOW WHITE'S ARSE
REVIRGINIZATION OF SNOW WHITE
APOTHEOSIS OF SNOW WHITE
SNOW WHITE RISES INTO THE SKY
THE HEROES DEPART IN SEARCH OF
A NEW PRINCIPLE
HEIGH-HO

"Sentence" refers to "novels in which the final chapter is a plastic bag filled with water, which you can touch, but not drink..." (116). Some of the best stories are in the 1968 collection, especially "The Balloon" that fills the entire sky over a large city, "The Indian Uprising," and "Can We Talk," where the narrator's day begins with the
discovery that the bank has painted all money yellow, and
ends with him "Dancing on my parquet floor in my parquet
shorts. To Mahler" (102).

4.3 Robert Coover, after a brilliant novel, The
Origins of the Brunoists (1966), has written a novel I dis-
like, though it was generally well received (1968), and
then an extremely fine collection of stories, Pricksongs
& Descants (1969). Again there is a fascination with "the
tradition," with the received literary tradition that both
provides contentual bits and categories and that is to be
re-done. "The Babysitter" is perhaps the most successful
story from the point of invention: the story/stories are
told from overlapping and contradictory points of view,
and we never quite know if the sitter is killed, has sex
with her boyfriend, is raped by her employer, or drowns
the baby in the bath. Gass notes that: "...our author
says yes to everything; we've been reading a remarkable
fugue--the stock fears and wishes, desires and dangers of
our time done into Bach" (106). Other stories in this
volume share a similar use of disoriented reality and
multiple perspective.

4.4 Additional writers could easily be cited--
notably William H. Gass, who has not only created some
exemplary fictions, but has published a volume of criti-
cism (1970) often critical of Coover, Barthelme, and simi-
lar authors. My point in introducing the authors cited
has not been to list contemporary "way-out" writers who
are using novel modes in remaking our categories of fic-
tion /18/, but to give some direct examples /19/ of writers
who use parabolic contents and developments, and who, in
the very shapes and structures of their fictions, are
busily re-assembling the modern fiction traditions. "De-
bunking" will be discussed in the next section: here
already I wanted to point to its role in contemporary
fiction. At least since Eliot's famous essay of 1917,
modern writing has been in a severe crisis with respect to
the uses to be made of the past. But perhaps fiction-writers reflect the larger cultural situation: I find it hard to think of a discipline or an aspect of cultural activity in which there has not been this problem of balancing the new and the old.

V. TOWARD A DEFINITION OF PARABLE

5.1 Moving toward a definition of parable as a literary term, it can be noted that several of the critics in the *TriQuarterly* "Prose for Borges" issue (1972, ed. Charles Newman, Mary Kinzie, and N. T. di Giovanni) actually use the term parable in their discussion. These references demonstrate how little agreement there is in using the term! For example, John Wright speaks of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" as a "...parable on the evolution of human culture" (Wright: 344). In the next sentence, however, he writes that: "It looks like a partly satiric, mock-utopian science-fiction story, and within certain limits that is what it is: a sardonic, learned tale...." The same writer refers to "The Man on the Threshold" as: "...an astonishingly direct and perfect parable of 'aesthetic reality'" (351), but this time he seems to refer primarily to the story-within-a-story device used by Borges.

5.2 I am somewhat more sympathetic to Ben Belitt's use of the term, although not at the point where he refers to parable's "...usual sense of enigmatic preaching..." (Belitt: 291), nor when he states that "...the total canon of...Borges constitutes a 'synopticon' of parables, a Kabbalah or [Maimonides'] *Book of Splendor*..." (286).

In the section of the article focussed primarily on Kafka, Belitt states that: "The parable, then, is a hermetic directive to the 'elect' through which action is turned into fable" /20/. I am intrigued by the suggestions that: "It is the essence of parable to avoid showdowns... and leave the issue suspended" and that: "...parables are a species of nonfunctional 'wisdom'--that is to say, one does not acquire the wisdom of parable in order to deplete
or discredit it" (272) /21/. Parable is pattern, orientation, direction, permission—not a form of knowledge that can be regulated or charted /22/.

5.3 Perhaps we are best remanded back to discussion of parable as metaphor—a line of approach already forwarded by Robert W. Funk (1966). See the review articles of Perrin (1967a; 1972). This time, however, I let William H. Gass be mentor, as when he discusses the use of metaphor as a means of learning a new vision; or, metaphor seen as a scientific tool (62):

In a sense yet to be fully discovered, the technique of the artist is like that of the scientist. He invariably views the transactions of life through a lens of concept: through the shrew, the wife, through the wife, the dog; and through the dog, the cold and persistent wind.

Belitt's suggestion that we do not acquire the wisdom of parable in order to use such knowledge as the scientist uses "facts" finds a parallel in Gass's comments about the indirectness of metaphor; indirectness or circumlocution of Funk's "penumbral focus" or Kafka's "fabulous yonder"—the manner in which parable is both utterly realistic and yet teases our minds to consideration of the super-realistic (Gass: 63):

Metaphor is a manner of inferring; a manner of setting down as directly and briefly and simply as possible whatever is necessary for the inference desired, although the conclusion may require premises that are neither brief or plain and do not seem direct, since direction, in both art and metaphor, is often indirection elsewhere; for it is as much a matter of concern there to seek the severe straight way as it is in science and mathematics to seek the same. But metaphor is more than a process of inference; it is also a form of presentation and display.

Gass continues (65) to speak of metaphor as "a kind of model-making," and he means by this that metaphors enable one to create models of possible situations of "...predictions which mere observation is helpless to do... /23/. Parable as metaphor, not just functioning with metaphoric
diction...parable as model-making: and the parabler joins other artists in standing at the edge of the possible, image-ing the future/the possible in diction that then becomes the way the future/the possible is experienced.

VI. CHARACTERISTICS OF PARABLES

6.0 Before turning to the final section of this paper, and in lieu of extensive discussion at this point, I conclude this section with structural and thematic areas that may be profitably explored in conjoint analysis of Jesuanic and non-Jesuanic parables. To explore any of these areas in detail would amount to another paper in itself; and perhaps the areas simply represent the areas in which I feel least competent! They are not all of the same weight, and for some of them (such as the first), the agenda would first demand recapitulation of substantive probes already made in the history of parable exegesis.

6.1 For analyzing Jesus' parables, and especially these parables as representing only one instance of parables-in-general (parable-as-genre), the following may be explored:

1. Secularity. Commentators have noted that Jesus does not usually turn to religious language or custom to image or to shape his parables; other parblers are not harnessed with the anticipation that they use religious thematics—and in this case one must ask whether they are "religious parblers" in a broad sense, or what aspects of their parables are religious or secular with respect to their particular contexts. "Secularity" can perhaps be modulated into "realism," and we have then the question of how parblers use the commonsense "world" as parabolic material. I suspect that we also have to learn to deal not only with realism and sur-realism, but with what I term super-realism, as seen in any number of contemporary fiction writers.

2. Reversal. I have discussed Borges' alleged rejection of the surprise ending, and this element will be explored
in the next section of this paper. Here the element is listed as a structural possibility; and it may be broadened considerably: are there structural characteristics of parables that can be graphed or otherwise analyzed visually?

3. Humor. The role of (intended) humor, and then related modes: irony, sarcasm. (Cf. Funk, 1966:195 on "comic criticism," discussed below.)

4. Revaluation of Traditions. To what extent are parables normally used (as we have seen that Israelite and Jesuanic parables are frequently used) to restructure a revered tradition? Does "use" of this sort mean that parables are didactic devices? Would the parable ever function to reinforce a "normal" world view?

5. Universality. Is the parable as "aesthetic object" necessarily a timeless entity? Is the identity of the parabler crucial to the parables as such? Or are there certain parables that gain/lose emphasis when directly linked to the identity of their parabler/s? (It is striking that dictionary definitions of parable often emphasize their universality and "timelessness.")

6. Application. The term is chosen because of the convention by which biblical critics identify passages supposedly appended to Jesus' parables, but the issue is a wider one (and involves, for instance, the question of didactic or other intention raised above). Should one say that the "normative parable" is application-free? (the hearer being left free to supply his own meaning-context and response). Does the parable normatively "leave the issues suspended?" (Belitt: 272). Or does one differentiate between parables usually left application-free, and those that are often/usually fitted with applications? If the hearer, as part of the mechanism of the parabolic narrative, finds himself having been drawn up into the parable /26/, can one affirm with Linnemann (1966:24) that: "The parable narrative is all the narrator says to his original listeners" (putting emphasis upon "original" rather than her stress on "all").

7. Narrative World. Harald Weinrich's distinction between
narrated- and reported-world (1964) has found many echoes in the Bonn "Generative Poetics" research team /27/. The distinction might be pursued profitably as a means of understanding the way parables seem complete in themselves: but is successful creation of a fictional universe anything specific to parable as a type of fiction /28/? Parab

criticism has more to learn from narrative criticism than even Dan Via has taught us in exploring the development of plots, roles of actors, "functions" taking place in the story (actions or "moves"), and the possible comparative analysis of sequence of functions in world literature. +

The Parables Seminar papers in Vol. 2 of this journal portray the movement of the Seminar fully into narrative criticism; Crossan's "The Good Samaritan: Towards a Generic Definition of Parable," especially, begins to tap deep-structural questions, which can lead us to compare the phenomenological functioning of Jesus' parables with those of other parablers.

8. Enigma and paradox, riddle and "dark saying." Related, of course, to the evangelists' theories of how Jesus' parables were intended (John is not to be omitted!), the "dark" or "mysterious" aspect of the parables ought not be lost to view. I suspect that any successfully-extended metaphor carries an element or two that do not immediately "open up," either to their original, or to subsequent, hearers/readers. This element is not only a matter of surface or style, as usually understood, but reaches deep into the heart of the parabolic event /29/.

9. Acteur-characterization and roles. Amos Wilder, especially, presses me to include this aspect; see his discussion of "authority" in his essay in this volume. There is also the matter of a dialogic element in parabolic discourse (see Michaelis: 47, noted in Doty, 1971:188 n. 2). Fred Craddock, in responding to an earlier draft of this paper, drew attention to the relationship--including oppositions--between parabler and hearers, something that Linnemann (1964) has treated in terms of the "interlocking" between them. Instead of emphasizing "opposition,"
however, I would emphasize possibility in the vis-à-vis: parables open out onto possible futures that are clearly perceived only in parable; otherwise they remain obscure or silly impossibilities. I am working on this utopian call toward possible futures in conjunction with a book on primitive Christian eschatological language.

VII. REVERSAL ELEMENT/S IN JESUS' PARABLES

7.1 For some time I have been attracted to the structural element in the parables of Jesus that causes a reversal of the auditors' expectations. There are many examples that might be cited, and I have listed some I find striking in an appendix, which may be consulted at this point. One may add or subtract examples according to one's own literary analyses.

Others seem to have been struck by this pattern, notably Robert W. Funk, who referred to "comic criticism" which functions "to debunk the 'going' understanding of the everyday situation" and "to open the way for a radically new disposition to reality, a disposition that is marked by the tragicomical" (1966:195f.). Comic criticism is part of the construction of the parables whereby: "The 'logic' of everydayness is broken upon the 'logic' of the parable" (213).

In attempting to expose ironical contours of several parables, Wolfgang Harnisch also speaks of a comic element—which Harnisch sees most clearly in the contrast between the Unjust Judge's lack of fear before God and man (Luke 18:2, 4b) and his obvious fear that the importunate woman will hit him in the face (18:5b) /30/. Dan Via's path-breaking book on the parables incorporates a reversal element into a structural analysis of the main tragic./. comic narrative patterns of the parables as individual aesthetic wholes /31/. Accepting Via's analyses in general, I am still concerned to press further toward a grasp of the phenomenon of the reversal itself: can we attain greater linguistic precision in describing the technique of the reversal itself, within the narrative structures
of the parables?

7.2 Already Paul Fiebig spoke of the "inconcinnity" (Inkonzninitält; lack of congruity, awkwardness) of the parables, by which he meant the disjuncture between the parable and the subject or situation that evoked the parabolic narrative, a disjuncture that he saw especially in rabbinical parables. Fiebig ascribed this to the tendency of Jewish literature (?) to avoid generalizations and to speak in concrete, specific terms, as well as to speak around the subject matter rather than directly to it; the conclusion, instead of drawing a simple one-to-one conclusion, then makes a specific remark, leaving the hearer to draw his own conclusions, or shifting attention from the actual topic to only one element of it (or to ancillary aspects—Nebentöne) /32/. A similar argument is presented independently by Günter Haufe who suggests that the imagic part of the Unjust Judge finds its material correspondence not in parabolic exposition but in Jesus' makarisms; and I think we might refer back to the earlier discussion to point to the inconsistency of Kafka's parables: evoked by the disjuncture in the author's experienced being-in-the-world mediated in parabolic narrative.

7.3 P. G. Wodehouse rather playfully remarked that "...a parable is one of those stories in the Bible which sounds like a pleasant yarn but keeps something up its sleeve which then suddenly pops up and leaves you flat" (quoted in Hunter: 74). What it is which is hidden in the sleeve of the parable's garment may be regarded as that element which jabs through the pretensions of the audience, as that which works loose the fabrics of "business as usual," and as that which causes the listener a momentary or permanent disorientation. In a seminar several years ago, I came to the conclusion that it may not be inappropriate to term the jarring element in certain of the parables the "immoral" factor. By this I refer to the way the contemporary audience's social, legal, and moral expectations were not only not met, but reversed in the
course of the story. There is an "immoral" reversal which cannot be anticipated: no pious father could have been expected to have welcomed openly a profligate son whose religious purity had been seriously compromised (Prodigal Son); an unclean foreigner (Good Samaritan) rather than the anticipated pious layman, tends the traveler's wounds.

7.4 Some parables break customary models of behavior: the Unjust Steward and the Unjust Judge are, of all things, praised for dealings that appear quite shady. The riffraff who are invited to enter into the Marriage Feast have no "right" to be invited; similarly it seems "unfair" to exclude half of the wedding group just because they were having such a good time that they fell asleep and let their batteries run down (Ten Maidens). The one-talent man gets a raw deal (Talents), as do the Laborers in the Vineyard—at least they get raw deals according to standard union demands /33/!

7.5 The Mustard Seed parable makes its point by mocking a revered traditional image of Israel's national fulfillment, the cedar (see Funk: 1973); the parable of the Leaven turns what is a negative image in rabbinic thought into a positive image. That there should be Weeds in Wheat was not unusual, but entirely ignoring them "until the harvest" seems odd (see Doty: 1971). Finally, the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl imply a lack of fair play on the part of the discoverer, who "should" have reported his find; and one wonders how often a responsible shepherd would have left most of his flock in questionable safety, in order to seek out one stray Lost Sheep /34/.

7.6 To highlight the "immoral" principle at work, we may note that several other parables may be called, in contrast, strictly "moral" (see the appendix). In these parables, which frequently explain or illustrate a discursive point, everything comes out as we would have expected; there is no abrupt reversal of everyday logics. The Unmerciful Servant gets his deserved fate, and the Last Judgment
eventuates just as it should, as does the denouement of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Neither the Pharisee nor the Publican suprises us with his behavior, nor do the Tower Builder or the King Going To War. Seed Grows Secretly, and various soils produce crops according to their discernible and logical nature (Sower).

Perhaps the suggested contrast between immoral and moral parables, or between those that sustain customary expectations and those that spring customary expectations, is an accidental dichotomy. However that may be, and I am more and more convinced of the self-conscious skill of Jesus as Parabler, identification of the reversal-of-the-expected provides an insight into how some parables are constructed. Crossan's three-fold thematic division (revelation, revolution, and resolution; 1973b) may then be correlated with this patterning, most of my examples falling into his final category: "...radical reappraisal of position and life demanded by the revelation...verbalized in parables which contain incidents of situational reversal..." (356).

7.7 W. Malcolm Clark writes of "conflict heightening and restructuring" in Israelite prophets, and points to this device as resulting: "...in a genuine transformation of the tradition which keeps the traditional elements but alters their structural elements." My sense that this device is also part of parabolic dynamics is strengthened when Clark uses the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) and Nathan's story of the lambs (2 Sam 12) to illustrate the "self conviction device" (Batson, Beker, and Clark: 99ff., 105f.). Speaking in terms that recall Georg Eichholz' analysis of the theatrical staging of the parables (1961), Clark notes that: "A situation is created in which the person is led along step by step in an analysis in which he wholeheartedly concurs, until at a final point he suddenly finds that unknowingly and unwillingly he has 'convicted' himself" (105). Expectations of the prophet's discourse (read: the parabler's discourse) are radically
transmuted; the "tradition" itself is placed into question, as seen in Jesus' tablefellowship (see Perrin: 1967b; and cf. Clark's references to the work of Amos Wilder, in Batson Beker and Clark: 73, 142ff.).

7.8 That which tradition defined as holy may, after the presentation of the oracle or parable, turn out to be defiling (107). Or the oracle/parable may free parts of the tradition for re-appropriation in new contexts leading to action: "Neither objective happened to change the 'situation,' but the oracle acts as a catalyst which enables the person to put the pieces back together in a different way" (108). We may speak of a consistent "debunking factor" (127) that shook open the religious fabrics of Israel in such a way as to dethrone ossified ideologizations and to cast new threads of interconnection and response. And, in prophetic oracle as in parable, the hearer may nod along in agreement—up to a crucial point of departure from what he wants to hear or expects to hear:

What takes place is analogous to what has been suggested as the essence of good poetry, which leads the reader along in a building sequence of expectations so that immediately before the end of the line he can predict the final word or meaning with certainty, only to discover that the poet has used this very expectation to say something different and bring the reader to a type of insight which he would not otherwise have experienced. (105)

The metaphoric insight is notoriously difficult to specify: I think Clark is pointing here to the successful "plus" moment that Crites calls the "luminous" symbolic moment when the three narrative tracks of sacred story, mundane story, and the temporal form of existence itself cross (305), or to Ricoeur's symbolic intersection of the cosmic (religious), oneiric (psychic), and the poetic (see Sinyard: 38f; and see Crossan: 1973b on poetic metaphor). Since intersection is doubtless the key to the "realism" theme mentioned earlier: the point is not to be found in Jesus' arbitrary manipulation of realistic, everyday images,
but in his creative juncturing of these features within a rich religious and psychic matrix of his own historicality /35/. It is the powerful, evocative, fusion/crisis that sparks the parabolic insight—which, however, I understand as a holistic experience including emotion, intellect, aesthetic and ethical commitment rather than merely as an "intellectual" insight. Parable opens up the remarkable-ness of the perceived world, it highlights and focusses what is "there" in a new gestalt leading to action and re-perception /36/.

7.9 In conclusion, I define the reversal element in this way: One of the structural literary characteristics of parabolic narrative is the reversal of expectations brought by the auditors/readers to the parabolic encounter; the reversal happens toward the end of the narrative, in such a way as to shatter "normal" or "moral" expectations, and to open up further expectations by casting out a line to the future, which may or may not sufficiently attract the auditors/readers so as to structure a renewed perception of the pre-parabolic universe. The mechanisms involved may include re-interpretation of traditional logics (perceptions, morals, metaphors), or re-structuring dialogic encounters so that the auditor escapes from the parabolic situation feeling that he has been drawn up into a narrated world whose "fictionality" becomes a replacement for his previous "reality." Shattered by the parabolic logic, the auditor's world can now only be rejected, affirmed, or re-assembled into new configurations that may not be shared by the majority of his contemporaries. If the parable establishes a "bridge" /37/, it is a crystal bridge that he knows to be solid, but which may only appear to another as the abyss being spanned.

This section of the paper has not sought to argue a verse-by-verse proof or to convince readers of a startlingly new element of parabolic construction. I have suggested that a constructional element of reversal can be identified in many parables, and have shown some examples
in an appendix and in the text. Hopefully this identification has seeded further explorations of constructional elements, pointed out some of the implications and uses of the device, and pointed beyond its own contours toward structural/generic analysis of parables as such. Writing the paper has given me new insight into the career of the parabler, who seems primarily to be the soul who sees positively and hopefully beyond the experienced strictures of his own context toward a future assembled both from the best of past traditions and with openings to anticipated change ahead. He is not just Lévi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, but a truly world-shaping and -evoking artist.

8.0 + Added June 1974

The main substantive revision I would like to undertake to the paper would be to incorporate analysis of the comic aspects of parables. Reading Brown I began to suspect that parable analysts found Via's comic/.tragic patterns too helpful too soon: we have tended to look for the "rising" or "falling" parabolic movements to the exclusion of the interior meanings in the comic/tragic patterns. Brown points to the ontic/ontological gap in human experience, and supports the theory that comedy responds to the ontic (Brown: "ontical"), tragedy to the ontological /38/. Both comedy and tragedy rest ultimately upon the basic contradiction of experience and ideals, but comedy seems especially able to sustain us in the presence of contradiction by enabling us to surmount the frustration of "unfulfilled hope" through upward movement. Assumedly the tragic interpretation of the same hypothetical event would lead to a more chastened view--*irony* being the force that "leaves one in the middle" (39), and which can be immobilizing /39/. It may be that we should pursue the affective tension that builds in a narrative, especially in *brief* narrative materials (parable, riddle, et. al.). Comedy might be seen as the mode that "releases" in the denouement, tragedy as holding to a point of resolution-by-projection onto an ontological level, and irony leaving the issues suspended.
### Appendix

#### "Immoral" Parables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parable</th>
<th>Reversal/Unusual Element (from auditor's perspective)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mustard Seed (Mk/Mt)</td>
<td>Mockery of traditional metaphors in Dan, Ezek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeds in Wheat (Mt)</td>
<td>Seems unnatural to ignore the weeds until harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaven (Mt/Lk)</td>
<td>Negative image (leaven = sin) for positive comparison with basileia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasure, Pearl (Mt)</td>
<td>Implied lack of sincerity—either agent should have reported find to original owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Sheep (Mt/Lk)</td>
<td>In Mt &amp; Thomas: more concern for the one found than right duty to the ninety-nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers in Vineyard (Mt)</td>
<td>Customary pattern of earning is upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Feast (Mt/Lk)</td>
<td>Unusual (immoral) to invite the riffraff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Maidens (Mt)</td>
<td>Seems &quot;unfair&quot; to exclude the five &quot;foolish&quot; ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talents (Mt/Lk)</td>
<td>Seems unfair to the one-talent person; obligation to invest and make profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Samaritan (Lk)</td>
<td>Unclean foreigner does the positive act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prodigal Son (Lk)</td>
<td>(1) Father going out; (2) to unclean son; (3) in spite of elder brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjust Steward &amp; Unjust Judge (Lk)</td>
<td><strong>Paradigms?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### "Moral" Parables

(Comes out just as one expects)

- Mt: Unmerciful Servant, Seed Growing Secretly, Last Judgment
- Mk/Mt/Lk: Sower
- Lk: Tower Builder, Rich Man and Lazarus, Pharisee and Publican
- Mt/Lk: House Builder
NOTES

/1/ Borges makes a different point in the material following the sentences quoted: "The first Kafka of Be-trachtung is less a precursor of the Kafka of the shadowy myths and atrocious institutions than is Browning or Lord Dunsany" (Borges, 1965:113). Monegal treats this passage in his analysis of Borges' "aesthetics of reading" and the identification of the universe as a vast book.

/2/ See, for instance, the complaint of a student at the University of Buenos Aires that his professor chose for class discussion: "...what is most important for Borges and not what is most important in the literature" (Christ, 1969:44, quoted by Coleman: 359).

/3/ See Berger who considers parable one of the customary modes of expression for conveying legal decisions in Hellenistic Judaism; Petuchowski who suggests that the argument that Jesus' parables are so "unique" rests upon improper Christian apologetic concerns; and Cave who sees rabbinic parables, and by extension, Jesus' parables, in the haggadic context of synagogue illustrations for liturgical scripture-readings. It is more important that we see the widest contemporary context of parable usage than that we argue narrowly for Jesus' distinctiveness or superiority of style.

/4/ Kafka's dreams (mentioned in his published diaries) are studied from a Freudian point of view—not very profitably—in Hall and Lind.

/5/ A similar turn appears in the story of a man trying to find a train station; the policeman from whom directions have been asked says: "from me you want to know?...give it up!" and turns away (quoted in Harnisch: 423)—perhaps what Kafka meant by "wanton behavior" in "In the Caravansary" (113).

/6/ Cf. Auden (159-160): "Though the hero of a parable may be given a proper name...and a definite historical and geographical setting, these particulars are irrelevant to the meaning of parable. To find out what, if anything, a parable means, I have to surrender my objectivity and identify myself with what I read." If the critic..."tries to interpret a parable, he will only reveal himself. What he writes will be a description of what the parable has done to him; of what it may do to others he does not and cannot have any idea."

/7/ Barrenechea (76) notes: "Borges' own narratives often point to the uselessness of Man's attempt to decipher a divine message in which he cannot distinguish the fundamental from the accessory." Precisely the same point is to be made with respect to Kafka's stories.
An exception: "A Problem" (244-245), which provides a striking parallel, in its chronicle of three possibilities open to Don Quixote when he discovers that he has killed a man, to Kafka's "Prometheus." It would be interesting to know if the story is a direct revision or simply one of Borges' many studies of the perspectival character of truth. (See Pearce; Berger and Luckmann; and Douglas for helpful insights into the relationship between realities and our perceptions of them.) I note striking affinities between Kafka's "My Destination" and Borges' "Borges and Myself." After writing this section, I found that Kinzie thinks that "The intentionally laconic proposals [of the latter story] are...meant to echo Kafka's even shorter 'Prometheus'..." (40), and notes the similar use of "an iteration with cosmic proportions..." (note 10). Belitt (283) also notes the parallelism.

Cf. Bachelard espec. the theme of poetry as a means of renewal, and reverie as a means of recognizing the poetic dimension of our own consciousness (159).

Cf. also "In the Train Station," where the conclusion is also the introduction to the next repetition of a cyclical narration. On disruption of usual understandings of narrative time in Coover, see Gass (104).

And I do not see how to differentiate parable from fiction in general. See Gütgemanns especially, where the problem is also left unanswered, and Magass (espec. 17-18).

Cf. "The Meeting"; and in "Emma Zunz": "The arduous events are outside of time, either because the immediate past is as if disconnected to the future, or because the parts which form these events do not seem to be consecutive" (Borges, 1964:134).

Cf. Burgin (39) where Borges refers to "...the idea of different times, no? Of different time schemes. Psychological time." Barrenechea suggests that Borges is as writer for whom "time is a mental process" (105), and that "...Borges succeeds in shaking the reader's security in his own temporal rhythm" (105-106). See also Stabb (37ff.).

Stevick (341) points to the same perception in several modern writers, noting, for instance, "...the atemporality of such fiction as Barthelme's...," an atemporality that serves to challenge usual perceptions in order to make available for fiction the use of several temporal levels simultaneously. Time-as-convention is emphasized as a new insight: "...an obsession with time is a convention which we never particularly noticed as a convention when a great deal of fiction was written that way. There is a perverse kind of time sense at work in new fiction, centering around a fascination with the junk of our culture, both linguistic and material."
I have tried my own hand at short story writing, and find the surprise ending to be comparatively easy. A fiction of lasting and widely-recognized value can hardly depend on such a trick alone; I suspect that the reason one tires of O. Henry, but can re-read Kafka and Borges again and again is that these authors write with a surface density, tension, and complexity that reinforce the reversal endings and that provide a rich fabric that remains evocative beyond recognition of the end reversal. I have tried to keep this in mind when reflecting on the reversal -- if it is merely a mechanical device whose meaning is exhausted within the parable, we merely have a clever story! On the other hand there is a danger of over-universalizing the parables, as Clark recognizes (Batson, Beker, and Clark: 142; cf. also Crites: 310): "So long as the story retains its primary hold on the imagination, the play of immediacy and the power of abstraction remain in productive tension. But when immediacy and abstract generality are wrenched out of the story altogether, drained of all musicality, the result is...demonic."

In my undergraduate course on parables, I regularly spend several hours just canvassing and evaluating definitions. Approximately twenty elements are suggested by dictionary and handbook accounts, the most frequent bearing on unreality and fabrication, or upon moral tale. The writers I discuss here were chosen more on the basis of my own implicit notions of "how a parable presents itself" than by these definitions. I have frequently disdained the "moral" aspect, since I and others have felt for a long time the necessity to guard Jesus from moralism (perhaps over-reacting to Adolf Jülicher and his followers). But in the wider purvey of literature, the term may be assumed to carry little weight further than "not-simply-entertaining," or as a differentiation from having "in-meaning" only. (See Via: 1967 on in- and through-meanings.)

The Cannibal, 1949; The Beetle Leg, 1951; The Goose on the Grave and The Owl, 1954; The Lime Twig, 1961; Second Skin, 1963; The Innocent Party (plays), 1966; Lunar Landscapes, 1969; Blood Oranges, 1971. + See also Hawkes and see Tanner.

Sometimes the William Burroughs/Norman Mailer gush-style works too headily into Barthelme, for instance, some of his stories breaking the narrative line too completely for my taste.


The subsequent paragraph is instructive on the relation between fable and parable as Belitt sees it:
"The parables of Jesus—flung, as it were, in handfuls, as if the Sower took no account of where they fell—show us fable at all stages of completion, incompletion, compression, and suspension. At times the 'plots' that we have come to expect of fable have been so compacted or abbreviated that there is little likelihood of putting them to edifying use. Even a full-dress parable—like the parable of the Sower—which takes its time and proceeds by stages so implicit in their imagery that they may be construed dialectically—aroused the instant consternation of the Disciples, to whom, said Christ, it was 'given to know,' and required the detailed exposition of the teller. Lacking the glosses of the master, the purport of Christ's parables apparently remained inaccessible. The hoped-for transformation of perception did not occur" (Belitt: 270).

Barrenechea's observation that Borges has fashioned stories out of the literary matter of essays (131) surely applies to "On Parables" of Kafka.

Barthes (1972) has some similar observations about cultural myths: "Truth to tell, what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality; in passing from the meaning to the form, the image loses some knowledge: the better to receive the knowledge in the concept. In actual fact, the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations. One must firmly stress this open character of the concept; it is not at all an abstract, purified essence; it is a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function." (119); and: "What must always be remembered is that myth is a double system; there occurs in it a sort of ubiquity: its point of departure is constituted by the arrival of a meaning." "Myth is a value, truth is no guarantee for it; nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi..." (123).


Some authors who are not necessarily parablers are suggested by Coleman (357): "And so, like Hawthorne, Melville, and Emerson, Borges' texts register metaphysical aurAs without being at all religious...."

Compare the category of "feigned history" of Tolkien, introduced by Crossan (1974, note 5). I was struck by some remarks on the diction of the Hellenistic diatribe, in a 1925 article by Nock ("Diatribe Form in the
Hermética," in Nock (I): "...a simile in the manner of the diatribe..." (27); "...the pictorial character appropria­
tive to the diatribe, which loved comparisons with every­
day phenomena" (29); "...that lack of sympathy with popu­
lar belief and practice which is also a mark of the dia­
tribe..." (29-30). Points of contrast are probably more
extensive than points of similarity, but Nock's observa­
tions lead me to reflect on the relation of parable and
diatribe both in subject matter (everyday phenomena,
popular belief and ethics) and with regard to their fun­
tional use in the Hellenistic literary milieu.

/26/ See Funk (1966:133) and, on the parable as
drama (and by extension, "game" as in game theory), see
Eichholz (1961; 1963:20f.). On the reader's role in "
Borges' stories: Wheelock (16); and on the dialogic ele­
ment, Linnemann, passim.

/27/ See especially Güttgemanns; the distinction is
usually introduced at a preliminary level of analysis.

/28/ Intrigued though I am by the distinction, I do
not see immediate gain; but we had to be reminded by Via
that the parables of Jesus have structural plots, and per­
haps in this case it is enough to be reminded of the fi­
tictionality of the parables. It is this type of "remind­
ing" that has led me to be especially interested in narra­
tive criticism in general, and through that to the morphog­
ical/structuralist analyses of Propp (as 1968 and 1972)
and now contemporary structuralism; bibliography of recent
works by Bremayer and Ellena in Gerber and Güttgemanns:
197-247--1096 items; and Gutgemanns (85 n. 7). + See
now the work prepared for the SBL Seminar: "A Basic Bib­
liography for Structuralist Analysis of the Parables,"
compiled March 1974, by J. D. Crossan, and distributed to
Seminar members = Semita 1 (1974) 236-274.

/29/ Style is perhaps truly "the man," and it is
also the "surface" or immediately-observable structure:
the two aspects are related interiorly, and just because
style is surface there is a danger of the judgment =
"superficial." Barrett (131) is instructive: "With the
artist, we have to listen not only to what the witness
says but how he says it: the intonation and rhythm of the
voice are inseparable from the content of what is said.
Style is not an external cosmetic laid on the surface but
part of his essential disposition. And transformation in
style in the case of a great art form like the novel
[the parable?—W.G.D.] are thus not mere external changes
but extend deep down into the life of the artist and his
period." With respect to Hemingway, Barrett notes (65):
"Style is not a literary confection, but a matter of
balance, rhythm, and simplicity; and these are the quali­
ties that hold a man together in his actions in the world."
The article (Harnisch: 421-436) gives references to other studies of irony (most notably those of Beda Allemann) and of irony in the teaching of Jesus. Unfortunately it does not take us very far: irony may be used as a didactic device to sharpen the narration, and as part of the mechanism by which parables speak of "the real world" in such a way as to refer to a possibly-real world that, however, makes sense only to one who accedes to the parabolic logic. The hearer is estranged from the real world in order to view more personally its estrangement.

Via (1967); additions and modifications in Via (1971). Crossan (1974) uses "reversal" to refer to the structural reversal in his group B of the servant parables, a reversal of a pattern established in group A: he is not referring to the larger context, however, but specifically to the structural variation of two groups of parables having the same formal identifiers (conflict between servant/.master; reckoning).

See Jones (49, and 64-79); and Fiebig (1912a: 93) emphasizing the variable relationship between subject and parable—which leads him to the important formal statement: "It is entirely wrong to want to exegete all of the parables according to exactly the same schema."

It is not my intention in these illustrations to suggest that an "immoral" aspect or an unusual turn of events dominates the parable to the extent that it excludes other interpretive possibilities; and I am not suggesting that one may not explain through careful historical-critical elaboration that the apparent immorality was a possible morality—my primary focus is upon striking surface appearances of immorality or reversal.

Hurley (758): "Unless one comprehends that the theology of Christ's teaching was one of complete reversal of the values of contemporary society, the need for a strategem such as the parable form will be missed." (My emphasis.) He then lists thirteen examples, and refers to Batey for "a treatment of the theology of reversal in the Gospels...."

In the course of discussing parables in class this year, I became more and more convinced that "reversal parables" are only one type of parable, and I want to emphasize that I do not see "reversal" as the only internal mechanism. We need to work toward sub-generic classification, leaving room for a range of parabolic materials that can include allegorical parables, parabolic images, and the like. (Cf. Wilder [91]: "Some of his parables [such as the parables of the Kingdom]...are in their nature more closely knit, more clearly shaped by a single vision.... But Jesus' illustrative stories have great variety.... Therefore there are some of what we call his parables which are indeed distinctive and powerful but looser in texture, not requiring the same inevitability and design.") One feature that strikes me about "major" parables is their
open ended nature: they "mean" differently according to the contexts of their hearers/listeners. I suspect this feature characterizes most excellent stories, but Dan O. Via, Jr., in response to this paper, raises a further question: granted the interactional qualities of the parables, can a listener hear a second parable in the same (naive) way he has heard a first? He also noted that some ending-reversals are anticipated in the parable body to a greater extent than is true with others.

/34/ The previous note is again relevant; analysis of surface structure must always go hand in hand with analysis that specifies the actual boundaries of the legally- or morally-permitted; as in the last two parables mentioned, the critic must remain sensitive to what would have been striking to the original auditors as well as to what is striking in his own interpretive context.

/35/ On Kafka's frequent reference to daily events as material for the transformations of his fiction, see Brod (84, 102, 129).

/36/ Cf. Magass (17): "Der Alltag scheint wohl vertraut zu sein, die Alltagswelt hat aber auch unentdeckte Stellen. Die Gleichnisse haben dann u.a. die Aufgabe, im Anschluss an die Bekanntheit der Alltagswelt, die Erzählweise Jesu mit der fremden und erstaunlichen Welt zusammenzustossen."

Cf. Waswo (451): "The lesson taught by the parable may be boldly summarized as the necessity of accommodating the irrational into a rationally ordered view and conduct of life, of acknowledging its claims and controlling it." "The parable thus affirms the kind of civilization which acknowledges human limitation even as it prescribes as a moral vision the transcendence of that limitation." And see Hart (248) on creative language increasing the phenomenological range of the given world.

/37/ Cf. "Verschränkung," Linnemann (35) which I understand as: "In the parable there is an 'interlocking' of the narrator's judgment and the listener's judgment on the question at hand." (Cf. Linnemann: 27 and index.).

/38/ "At the level of human existence the comic may occur when one experiences the differential between life as it is and life as it ought to be" (37). In response to "The basic incongruity...between an ideal and an actual" (37), comedy makes a personal, ontic(al) reaction, tragedy a cosmic or ontological one: "Tragedy is characterized by unfulfilled hope" (38).
"The paralysis of the ironic posture is fatalistic unless one is moved beyond it." See Brown's treatment of the creative movement from comedy to faith, partly dependent upon S. Langer. On the "gappiness" of existence, see especially Hart and on the reversal in jokes, see Underwood (231ff.).
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