

## Parables between Realism and Ideology

*Anders Martinsen*

It is commonly accepted among New Testament scholars that the parables accurately depict the daily life of Jesus's surroundings.<sup>1</sup> This notion goes back to the inception of modern parable studies in the nineteenth century and has met little resistance from scholars since. In general, realism (or related terms), when applied to the parables, means that they refer to everyday life or nature.<sup>2</sup> This is akin to a common-sense understanding of realism, according to which something is realistic when things are represented "the way they are," as opposed to the fantastical, supernatural, or burlesque. The New Testament parables, as argued by Charles W. Hedrick, are realistic because they represent actions and events that could have taken place, and depict humans and nature accurately and neutrally.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, when the parables reverse the expectations of their receivers or become hyperbolic, they still resonate with "the common life experience" of Jesus's listeners.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the purported

1 These assertions are, for instance, found in dictionaries and encyclopaedias; literature often encapsulates the consensus of the state of research. See John Dominic Crossan, "Parables," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:150; John Dominic Crossan, "Parable," in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 805; see also Stephen I. Wright, "Parables," in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 1021; William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 496; Daniel J. Harrington, "Parables," in *Historical Dictionary of Jesus*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, HDRPM 102 (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 115–116; Garwood Anderson, "Parables," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 652. There are some exceptions; a more moderate proposal is found in Bruce D. Chilton, "Parables," in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London: Routledge, 2007), 253–254.

2 This is typical of studies following the work of Charles Dodd and Joachim Jeremias; see below.

3 Charles W. Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables: Jesus and His Modern Critics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 4–81, and Charles W. Hedrick, "Survivors of the Crucifixion: Searching for the Profiles in the Parables," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*, ed. Ruben Zimmermann, WUNT 231 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 165, 174 with n40, 178, and 179.

4 Ernest van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 36–39. See also, Norman A. Huffman, "Atypical Features in the Parables of Jesus," *JBL* 97 (1978): 207–220.

realism in the parables is used to differentiate them from other ancient, comparative literature like fables and/or rabbinic parables.<sup>5</sup> Altogether, realism is considered one of the defining traits of the parables to the extent that it has become a truism that the parables of Jesus were realistic. But should this realism be taken for granted?

A cursory look at dictionaries on literary theory shows that realism is a contested concept,<sup>6</sup> which cannot simply be understood as the credible representation of some external, historical reality. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to discuss realism as it is used in parable studies. The complexities involved in realism can be exemplified with a set of questions: What is realism? How does realism work in fiction? Are parables as a genre characterized by realism, or does this only hold for Jesus's parables? Moreover, how do we know that something is realistic? Is it because a credible or fair representation of the outside reality is given? Is it because the mode of representation is impartial and literary effects are toned down? Is it because the narrative successfully imitates real life? Finally, to whom is something realistic? Can we assume that the degree of realism is equal to every listener, and would the listeners in early Christianity perceive the parables as realistic? In this chapter, I will argue that the prevalent understanding of the parables as realistic is problematic, if not untenable. To do so, I will first provide a brief overview of the history of scholarship on parables, and trace the alleged realism of parables from early, critical parable studies to contemporary parable studies.<sup>7</sup> Next, I will problematize this realism by arguing that parables are realistic on a theoretical level, and, finally, show how scholars struggle to reconcile the violence in the parables with the notion of realism in them.

## 1 A Brief Overview of Scholarship on Parables and Realism

In the middle of the nineteenth century, scholars began to break with the old paradigm of interpreting the parables allegorically, morally, and in

5 John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 2 and 13; and Ruben Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables: Methods and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 143, see also 53, 92–93, and 99.

6 See, for instance, Julian Wolfreys, Ruth Robbins, and Kenneth Womack, *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 85–86, and John Anthony Cuddon et al., *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 591–593.

7 For the sake of brevity, the presentation is not intended to be exhaustive but constitutes a representative discussion of parable studies and its history of scholarship.

harmony with church doctrine. Richard C. Trench, Siegfried Goebel, and Alexander B. Bruce started approaching the parables in a more systematic and methodological manner than previous generations had done. Bruce in particular challenged the dominance of allegorical interpretations. The three argued that the parables, in the words of Bruce, showed “fidelity to nature, and to the customs of the time in which they were spoken.”<sup>8</sup> For Trench and Goebel, this quality distinguished Jesus’s parables from rabbinic parables, which were supposedly unreal and inferior.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, these were preconceived contentions, not derived from a careful consideration of aesthetic criteria. For the rabbinic parables, their evaluation rested on a theological bias against Judaism.<sup>10</sup> This development in parable studies was paralleled in studies of the historical Jesus and early Christianity, which asserted that the parables—whether all of them, or a selection from Matthew—were authentic and shaped by Jesus’s surroundings in Galilee.<sup>11</sup> Liberal theologians interpreted the parables mostly as moral stories. Bernhard Weiss thus argued that the parables are dissociated from allegory. Instead, they are didactic narratives that refer to reality and real life. Jesus told parables to convey the message of the kingdom, but he also used the parables’ gnomic form to attract the attention of those most receptive to its message.<sup>12</sup> Adolf von Harnack, the leading liberal voice, argued that the parables of the kingdom convey purely moral matters, and as such formed the backbone of the religion of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

These developments in studies of Jesus and the parables in the latter part of the nineteenth century were influential for the scholarly conviction that the parables of Jesus were unique in their context. This conviction was based upon an interpretation of the content in the parables conforming with the

8 Alexander B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ: A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of Our Lord*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1886), 1.

9 Richard C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, 14th ed. (London: MacMillan, 1882), 7; Siegfried Goebel, *The Parables of Jesus: A Methodical Exposition*, trans. Louis A. Banks (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890), 4–9.

10 Trench, *Notes on the Parables*, 48–56; Goebel, *The Parables of Jesus*, 13–14. On Bruce and rabbinical parables, see: Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ*, 214, 256n1. See also William Arnot, *The Parables of Our Lord* (London: Nelson, 1893), 21–36.

11 Ernest Renan, *Renan’s Life of Jesus: Translated with an Introduction*, trans. William G. Hutchison (London: Walter Scott, 1897), 106–109, and Ernest Renan, *The History of the Origins of Christianity*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (London: Mathieson, 1890), 41–43 and 51–53; Ferdinand Christian Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Allan Menzies, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1878), 1:27–36. David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1864), 194–195.

12 Bernhard Weiss, *The Life of Christ*, trans. John Walter Hope, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1883), 2:117–120 and 2:205–216.

13 Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1908), 60 and 79.

interpreters' theological outlook. Jesus the moral storyteller owed more to the modern Christianity of the nineteenth century than the early Christianity of the first century. It is telling that Johannes Weiss's argument that Jesus's teaching was alien to modern sensibilities had little impact on parables studies.<sup>14</sup> Weiss's arguments about the eschatological kingdom, subsequently taken up also by Albert Schweitzer, did find their way into parable studies,<sup>15</sup> but the efforts to harmonize the message of the parables with modern theological sensibilities continued to shape the tendency of these studies. The notion of the realism of parables has its roots in this development. It is an assertion that uses the Jewish tradition and Greek parables as a negative backdrop in order to highlight the uniqueness of Jesus.

It was the publication of Adolf Jülicher's *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* that set the standard for interpreting the parables within the historical-critical paradigm. According to Jülicher, the parables were originally intended as lucid stories, unlike allegories, whose meaning is veiled. For this reason, the language and images in the parables had to be accessible to everyone.<sup>16</sup> Parables were meant to be understood the way they were told.<sup>17</sup> Notably, Jülicher did not share the common dismissal of fables as unrealistic,<sup>18</sup> but he did claim that the parables were uniquely related to Jesus by their "originality," "simplicity," and "naturalness."<sup>19</sup> Two of Jülicher's early critics, Christian Bugge and Paul Fiebig, blamed Jülicher for favouring Greek rhetoric over the Jewish tradition.<sup>20</sup> Although Fiebig emphasized the similarity between Jesus's parables and those of the rabbis, he still maintained the exceptionalism of Jesus and his parables.<sup>21</sup> The suggestion that the parables of Jesus overlapped with Greek fables and/or Jewish parables did not gain much traction among scholars after Fiebig. A more impartial investigation of parables as conventional and generic

14 Johannes Weiss, *Jesus's Proclamation of the Kingdom*, trans. Richard Hyde Hiers and David Larrimore Holland (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 98, 107–108, and 113–114.

15 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery, 2nd ed. (London: Black, 1911). See Charles H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev. ed. (London: Collins, 1978), 38–44 and 60–61.

16 Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Mohr, 1888), 1:143–145, 53, 72–75, 81–85, 98, and 143–145.

17 Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 111.

18 Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 101–103.

19 Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 179.

20 Christian August Bugge, *Die Haupt-Parabeln Jesu: Mit einer Einleitung über die Methode der Parabelauslegung* (Giessen: Ricker/Töpelmann, 1903); Paul Fiebig, *Altjüdische Gleichnisse und die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904).

21 Fiebig, *Altjüdische Gleichnisse*, 162–163, concluded that the superiority of Jesus' parables concerned the form, not the content.

narratives could have worked to diminish the thesis of Jesus's singularity,<sup>22</sup> but the majority of New Testament studies continued to emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus and his parables.<sup>23</sup>

After Jülicher's *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, the most significant development in parable studies came from criticism. The proposal to understand parables in relation to Jesus's activities was proposed by Willard H. Robinson and then by Arthur T. Cadoux,<sup>24</sup> and developed further by arguably the two most influential twentieth-century parable scholars, Charles H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias. Dodd argued that the parables should be understood in the context of Jesus's ministry.<sup>25</sup> In *The Parables of the Kingdom*, he proposed that a parable "is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, parables give "a more complete picture of *petit-bourgeois* and peasant life than we possess for any other province except Egypt."<sup>27</sup> This sense of the realism of parables had a clear existential and theological dimension that bridged "the Kingdom of God with the human world."<sup>28</sup> Here Dodd seems to be influenced by the tradition that connected the purported spiritual truths in the parables with their respect for the natural order. Jeremias's *The Parables of Jesus* was in a sense the culmination of the trajectory in parable studies after Jülicher. There had been a tendency in parable studies to argue that Jesus used parables to respond to the situation with which he was confronted—almost as a spontaneous riposte to his opponents. The naturalness of the parables served to support this proposition, since it showed how Jesus used his immediate surroundings to construct his parables. Jeremias's intention was to pinpoint the situation in which Jesus told his parables in order to retrieve their original meaning,<sup>29</sup> and he made them virtually inseparable from Jesus.<sup>30</sup> To reconstruct the original

22 See Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1935), 252–251.

23 For instance, Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 2nd ed., FRLANT 29 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931), 222, argued that an authentic parable from Jesus was the obverse of Jewish piety.

24 Willard H. Robinson, *The Parables of Jesus in Relation to His Ministry* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1928). Robinson proposes that the naturalness of Jesus's parables makes them distinct from the rabbinic parables and fables (and even from parables in Buddhism), 53–86. Arthur T. Cadoux, *The Parables of Jesus: Their Art and Use* (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 9–59.

25 Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 23–27.

26 Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 16.

27 Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 21.

28 Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 20.

29 Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, transl. Samuel Henry Hooke, 3rd rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1972), 11–22.

30 See particularly Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 228–230.

form of the parables was to read a transcript of Jesus's very words. Hence, Jeremias had little interest in the Jewish tradition as an independent source of parables.<sup>31</sup>

Parable studies in the wake of Jülicher, Dodd, and Jeremias maintained this insistence on the realistic nature of parables.<sup>32</sup> The proponents of the historical-critical paradigm treated the parables as historical pieces in the sense that all the actions ought to be conceivable within a historical setting. To understand the parables was to find historical comparative sources that would explain them.<sup>33</sup> But against this historicism, scholars gradually began to turn their attention to the parables as literature.<sup>34</sup> This turned into an aesthetical approach to the parables that fused recent developments in literary theory, such as new criticism and structuralism, with German scholarship and the new/second quest and a phenomenological hermeneutic approach in the tradition of Rudolf Bultmann, referred to as the "new hermeneutic."<sup>35</sup> The key, as proposed by Ernst Fuchs, was for the parables to be seen as language events (*Sprachereignisse*). In other words, they invited the audience to a partial experience of Jesus's relationship with God.<sup>36</sup> The aesthetical-existential interpretation of the parables strongly emphasized language as constitutive of "our" reality and of the parables' ability to cause ruptures in "our" conventional

31 Bugge and Fiebig are referenced by Jeremias, but not discussed. Jeremias did not refer to William Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background* (New York: MacMillan, 1936). Oesterley had suggested that the rabbinic parables may have had a long oral tradition (6–7). However, Oesterley also argued that the rabbinic parables paled in comparison to the gospel parables (10–11). On Jeremias and Judaism, see Tania Oldenhage, *Parables for Our Time: Rereading New Testament Scholarship after the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002).

32 Thomas W. Manson, *Sayings of Jesus: As Recorded in the Gospels According to St. Mathew and St. Luke*, 7th ed. (London: SCM, 1977), 57–59; Geraint Vaughan Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables: A Study in Their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1964), 57–58 and 77–79; Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 73–74; and Archibald M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables*, 4th ed. (London: SCM, 1972), 8–19; and Charles W.F. Smith, *The Jesus of the Parables*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1975), 13–16.

33 John Duncan M. Derret, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Dodd, 1970), 31–39.

34 Early examples of this approach include Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*; Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables*.

35 See Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 107–127.

36 Ernst Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, SHT 42 (London: SCM, 1964), 30–32, 73–75, and 210–211. It was Eta Linnemann, a student of Fuchs, who developed the concept of language-events into a full study on the parables; see her *The Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*, trans. John Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1966).

understanding of the kingdom of God.<sup>37</sup> John Dominic Crossan stressed parables as subversive stories, arguing that Jesus was a radical poet whose parables “shatter the deep structure of our accepted world.”<sup>38</sup> While this was a new and, for the time, innovative approach to the parables, it attributed an unprecedented power to them, rendering them incomparable with other forms of narratives. Furthermore, the historical backdrop for Jesus and the parables rested on the work of Jeremias and on the second/new quest, especially its criterion of dissimilarity.<sup>39</sup> An unintentional ramification of this approach was its maintenance of the exceptionalism of Jesus evident in previous scholarship.

The fusion between the literary-aesthetical and historical approaches preserved the goal in parable studies: determining their primary meaning, be it through authorial intent or deep structure. The specific aspect of the aesthetical interpretation was that the literary theories employed were in a sense anti-historical and did not value authorial intent,<sup>40</sup> but the aesthetical movement did little to deflate the image of Jesus and the parables as unique.<sup>41</sup> Suggestions that the parables’ narrative structure, form, and rhetorical style revealed a generic compositional pattern did not fit these ideas of parables as extra-ordinary, challenging, and subversive stories.<sup>42</sup> Nor was the belief that the parables virtually provided a snapshot of ancient life disputed.<sup>43</sup>

The development of parables studies in the aftermath of the aesthetic movement added new perspectives from social history and social/cultural anthropology. The intention was to contextualize the parables by reconstructing their proper environment and the culturally conditioned expectations of the receivers.<sup>44</sup> Bernard Brandon Scott argued that the world of first-century

37 Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 124–140 and 158–162; Dan O. Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 41, 188, and 192; John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1992), 11–22.

38 John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles: Argus Communications, 1975), 123. Also, Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence: Form of the New Testament Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 16–19 and 30.

39 John Dominic Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 175–177, and John Dominic Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 48–49.

40 Paul Ricœur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 4 (1975): 29.

41 Mary Ann Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 42.

42 See Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 70–91.

43 E.g., Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 104.

44 Kenneth E. Bailey introduced “Oriental exegesis” to bridge the gap between the otherness of first-century Palestine and the situation of contemporary readers of the parables;

Roman Palestine “informs the repertoire, the conventions, world view, ideologies, and stereotypes active in a text.”<sup>45</sup> The repertoire of the parables (like stock characters) was conventional, but their meanings were not. They reverse the expectations of the receivers.<sup>46</sup> In his interpretation of the parables, Scott attempts to reconstruct the implied reader (meaning that the text anticipates a response based on its structural patterns), based on knowledge of the parables’ context.<sup>47</sup> The difficulty, however, is that it is hard to reconstruct those expectations without making crude contrasts between the wisdom of Jesus and conventional wisdom.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Scott’s elaborate interpretations make it doubtful whether a historical receiver would have understood the parables’ meaning.

A more simplified and direct approach to the parables as subversive was given by William R. Herzog. He combined socio-economic interpretations of the parables with the notion of the subversiveness of parables, especially in the political and material realm.<sup>49</sup> Herzog argues that parables contain types (for instance, the king) which point to the social experiences of the receivers (mostly peasants). Therefore, reconstructions must take the political and economic situation into account to properly grasp that experience.<sup>50</sup> The socio-political interpretations treat the parables as didactic vehicles with the intention of enlightening their receivers. This represents a return to a strong focus on authorial intent and the idea that the parables can only be understood within the correct historical framework. Jesus’s intention is thus considered to have been shaped by a certain socio-economic context. For instance, the unjust distribution of wealth becomes determinative for understanding Jesus’s intention as well as his parables, which in turn amounts to a very instrumental view on the parables as narratives. Likewise, Luise Schottroff argues that the parables address the political structures of their time and real-life

---

see Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through the Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). At best, Bailey’s method is eclectic. He is unable to demonstrate how the narrative reflects oriental values other than anecdotally.

- 45 Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 76. According to Scott, the parables “have high verisimilitude, as attested by their use of everydayness, but everydayness has been fictionalized by being taken up into story!” (41).
- 46 Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 66–68.
- 47 Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 75.
- 48 On Judaism, see, e.g., Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 207, 234–235.
- 49 William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 3. Herzog models Jesus’s ministry on Paulo Freire (16–29).
- 50 Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 53–73.



issues, informed by “the Gospel of the poor.”<sup>51</sup> Schottroff’s approach cannot escape the same criticism levelled against Herzog, and she is often forced to work against the narrative in the parable to make her interpretations fit her commitment to a liberation theology program.

The social, historical, and literary interpretations of parables were criticized by scholars like Craig Blomberg and Klyne Snodgrass, who favoured a return to Jesus’s theological message.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the developments in parable studies brought some changes, as new insights into rabbinic parables modified presuppositions about the singularity of the New Testament parables and toned down the naïve acceptance of realism.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, parable studies still largely centre on Jesus—at times accompanied by exaggerated praise of Jesus as a “master storyteller.”<sup>54</sup> The strong emphasis on Jesus and his message or intent reduces parable studies to the study of Jesus as a charismatic individual whose success can be explained by the persuasive power of his parables. So too the emphasis on the religious message of the parables reflects modern theological presuppositions as much as the oft-criticized socio-political interpretations do.<sup>55</sup> This seems to tie contemporary studies to early critical studies once again by a shared inclination to blend historical-critical reconstructions with theological propositions in the interpretation of parables.

## 2 The Problem with Realism

In this section, I will discuss the mainstream conviction that parables, by virtue of being realistic narratives, refer to facts about a past society.<sup>56</sup> As noted above, it has been recognized that parables include unrealistic parts. In this

51 Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 81–105.

52 Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990); Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

53 Blomberg, *Interpreting Parables*, 166; Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 3–11; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 5, *Probing the Authenticity of the Parables* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 42; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 30.

54 Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 1–3. The praise of Jesus and/or his parables is a common trope in parable studies.

55 Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 324; Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Reading to Hear: A Hermeneutics of Hearing,” *HBT* 24 (2002): 9–11, 31–32, and Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Prophets, Parables, and Theologians,” *BTB* 18 (2008): 65–67 and 77.

56 For example, Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, 143–145. It has been suggested that the realism in the parables meant reference to real events. These suggestions have little support, and I will not deal with them here.

regard, it becomes the interpreter's task to identify and distinguish between the realistic everyday life depictions and the exaggerations that break that realism.<sup>57</sup> However, such differentiation is too arbitrary, and it does not solve the basic problems of realism. These problems can be outlined as follows: First, are the parables as narratives merely windows into the past historical reality? Second, do they give access to a stable subject behind them (in this case, Jesus), who composed these narratives based on his experience? Third, is it possible to determine the response to the parables? And fourth, can scholars "in front of the text" successfully reconstruct that historical context, the author's intentions, and the receivers' response?

If parables are understood to represent daily life in Galilean villages and their surroundings, it becomes possible to use the parables as windows into or snapshots of the everyday life of Jesus's environment.<sup>58</sup> As such, the notion of realism is a short step from the argument that the parables also contain Jesus's interpretation of those social and cultural practices.<sup>59</sup> The parables, then, not only provide glimpses into Jesus's historical situation, but also offer access to his theological assessment of that reality.<sup>60</sup> This presupposition lends itself to the idea that Jesus described the reality as it appeared to him and his listeners. And by doing so, the parables reveal Jesus's affinity with everyday life, his ability to connect with the ordinary. Furthermore, it assumes that the parables' description of reality is the same for "us" as it was for the ancient listener, on the condition that "we" as readers are properly equipped to understand their historical context.<sup>61</sup> The core of these assumptions is that the language in the parables transparently represents both the past reality of Jesus and his mindset. These assumptions inevitably tie into perceptions about Jesus as the author

57 For example, Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, 217–224, 245–247, and 272–277.

58 Douglas E. Oakman "Was Jesus a Peasant? Implications for Reading the Samaritan Story (Luke 10:30-35)," *BTB* 22 (1992): 122.

59 Van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 12–13.

60 Charles W. Hedrick, *Parables as Poetic Fiction: The Creative Voice of Jesus* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 4–81, and Hedrick, "Survivors of the Crucifixion," 176.

61 For instance, social-scientific criticism of the parables presumes that parables have a primary meaning which is directly tied to Jesus and his social environment. See, e.g., Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror?," *BTB* 23 (1993): 32–39, and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "A Dysfunctional Family and Its Neighbours (Luke 15:11b-32)," in *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting the Parables of Jesus Today*, ed. V. George Shillington (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 141–164; Van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 1–43. This means that the setting of the parables and their receivers, usually defined as "the peasants," and their values must be reconstructed. The problem is that the peasant becomes an ideal type with a predictable response to a parable.

of the parables. Designating Jesus as their author slots these parables into a specific historical context from which it is possible to extract historical data. For instance, the notion that the parables reflect their historical context and cohere with the overall teaching of Jesus,<sup>62</sup> or that they demand a response,<sup>63</sup> are both closely tied to the image of Jesus as a storyteller.

The understanding outlined above reveals a common-sense conception of referentiality that is associated with historical criticism.<sup>64</sup> The problem is not that it is necessary to situate the parables—as historical and fictional narratives—in their social and literary context if the purpose is to flesh out their possible meaning in early Christianity.<sup>65</sup> Nor does this criticism eviscerate Jesus as a historical person or “author” of the parables, and it also does not deny that the parables were originally told with a specific intent. Rather, the problem is that the conception of the parables as realistic, as outlined above, presupposes that fictional narratives (like parables) in some way successfully imitate real life in a disinterested manner, and, subsequently, that this mode of representation provides a path to the mind that conceived these stories. The idea that the parables are realistic is simply too tidy, since it assumes that facts about Jesus and the parables are waiting to be discovered by the interpreter. Instead, more attention should be given to the interpretive processes that explain and give meaning to the parables. The realities represented in them are not static; what is considered realistic will be prone to change. For this reason, it does not suffice to treat parables as windows to the past.<sup>66</sup>

Treating the parables as windows to the past overlooks the circumstance that representations and narratives generate new meanings. To put it differently, a parable does not merely refer to an outside of the text, but it facilitates that

62 Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 2; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 36–39.

63 Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence*, 17 and 155; Frederick Houk Borsch, *Many Things in Parables: Extravagant Stories of New Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 1; V. George Shillington, “Engaging with the Parables,” in *Jesus and His Parables*, 15.

64 See John J. Collins’s description of historical criticism in *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 4.

65 See John S. Kloppenborg, “The Parable of the Burglar in Q: Insights from Papyrology,” in *Metaphor, Narrative, and Parables in Q*, ed. Dieter T. Roth, Ruben Zimmermann, and Michael Labahn, WUNT 315 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 287–306, and Zimmermann, *Puzzling the Parables*, 196–198.

66 There is no space here to elaborate on theoretical premises for my argument. For further discussion, I refer to Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

outside.<sup>67</sup> A text appears to represent a real world outside the text, and when it is read as such, its mythologising or ideological presentation of said world is accepted as “real.” For example, it matters if the characters in the parables are interpreted as stock characters referring to conventional stereotypes or if they are seen as realistic. Interpreting the parables as “snapshots” or expressions of everyday life as seen by Jesus risks turning ideological representations into credible historical representations. Another aspect is the work scholars do to reconstruct the historical context in which Jesus told the parables. As I showed in the first section, stereotypical presentations of Judaism are often accepted as factual and then projected onto the parables and their context. These stereotypes are not so much “discoveries” of scholars, but assumptions which are disseminated, often unintentionally, simply by citing and referencing the work of others.

Likewise, the problems apply to Jesus as the author of the parables and the effects of the parables on the receivers. The historical subject as author, in this case Jesus, signifies something beyond the purely historical description of him as author/teller of parables which, subsequently, excludes some meanings and opens others. The concept of Jesus as an author is used as a unifying principle that brings a coherent meaning to the parables, which are supposed to be expressive of his imagination and experience.<sup>68</sup> The highly conjectural aspects to reconstructions of Jesus’s life and context make it possible to reconstruct several plausible but nonetheless different contexts for Jesus and the parables. Each context alters the meaning—for instance, when a parable’s addressee is understood to be the disciples, the crowd, or certain Jewish groups. What is understood as “normal,” “natural,” and close to Jesus’s teachings depends to a large degree on the definition of these concepts and on the methods and sources used to reconstruct them.

The same problems apply when scholars attempt to determine the receiver’s response. The response is contingent on the reconstructed context in which the parables were told and on the construction of the receiver, which is usually an ideal receiver (like *the* peasant). The socio-economic and political interpretations treat the realism in parables as a pathway to the expectations of

67 This is based on Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect”/“The Discourse of History,” in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 141–148. The linguistic and semantic premises behind this conclusion are debatable.

68 This paragraph builds on Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *The Rustle of Language*, 49–55, and Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975); Michel Foucault “What is an Author,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101–121; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).

the receivers, as if a historical reconstruction based upon macro-sociological studies with such a level of abstraction can be superimposed upon a historical audience. Moreover, they presuppose an ideal receiver with the right set of expectations and openness to be changed by the parables. Only the proper receiver can fully understand the meaning in the parables and be changed by it. Yet this smacks all too much of a modern understanding of parables. It has been argued that listeners are invited to participate in the story of a parable, a device enabled by its realism. After that, the parable challenges them.<sup>69</sup> But how is it possible to determine the degree of identification and the listeners' response? A closer look reveals that these theories are sustained by specific theories of parables. They are based on a set of propositions that cannot be verified by the parables themselves or by historical reconstructions of them. These theories do, however, serve to maintain the aura of Jesus's uniqueness as well as the allegedly profound nature of the parables.<sup>70</sup>

### 3 The Parables and the Limits of Realism

In this final section, I will address what I refer to as the limits of realism. As mentioned, scholars recognize that aspects in the parables are atypical or hyperbolic. These aspects break away from the realism in the parables. For example, the violence in the parables is often labelled as atypical. Several parables refer to violent retribution against the narrative antagonists (e.g., Matt 18:34, 21:41, 22:7, 24:51; Luke 12:46, 12:47–48, and 19:27). The one who condemns and punishes in the parables is a king, landlord, or slave master, and at the receiving end are the subjects or slaves of the ruler/master. There is little doubt that ancient society was a violent society. Wars and military campaigns were frequent, extraction of goods and taxes common, and slaves were routinely beaten and mistreated. Why would parables too not contain violence?<sup>71</sup> It would follow from the thesis that parables are realistic and close to life, offering depictions drawn from Jesus's own observations. Hence, also the violence should be regarded as realistic. However, once confronted with the harshness

69 David P. Parris, "Imitating the Parables: Allegory, Narrative and the Role of Mimesis," *JSNT* 25 (2002): 33–53 and Matthew C. Rindge, "Luke's Artistic Parables: Narratives of Subversion, Imagination, and Transformation," *Int* 68 (2014): 403–415.

70 Rindge, "Luke's Artistic Parables," 414.

71 John S. Kloppenborg, "The Representation of Violence in Synoptic Parables," in *Mark and Matthew 1: Comparative Readings: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in Their First-Century Settings*, ed. Anders Runesson and Eve-Marie Becker, WUNT 271 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 323–351.

of eschatological violent retribution, scholars seem to reach the limits of realism—perhaps accentuated by the tendency to treat parables as specific of Jesus and as an expression of his intentions—and the violence is categorized as atypical.<sup>72</sup>

In Matt 18:34, the “evil servant” (or, preferably, “slave,” δούλος) is condemned by the king and ordered to be handed over to “the torturers” (τοῖς βασανισταῖς). In response to this verse, it has been argued that the parable reflects an “oriental context” since Jewish law forbids torture,<sup>73</sup> the punishment has been euphemized<sup>74</sup> or its purpose downplayed,<sup>75</sup> or the severity and inhumanity of the punishment have been set aside to focus on God’s forgiveness.<sup>76</sup> In Matt 24:51//Luke 12:46, the “unfaithful steward” is likewise condemned and given the grisly punishment of being hacked or sawn in two (διχοτομέω),<sup>77</sup> and the same interpretive strategies have been applied. The punishment has been interpreted as a mistranslation from the Aramaic,<sup>78</sup> with several different hypotheses concerning the nature of the mistranslation.<sup>79</sup> It has also been labelled “Persian” or “oriental.”<sup>80</sup> Or else the punishment has been explained as hyperbole, without being meant literally.<sup>81</sup> The command for mass executions in Luke 19:27 (the term used is κατασφάζω, slaughter)<sup>82</sup> offers another example of the way violence is downplayed.<sup>83</sup> Other interpretive strategies do recognize the violence, but read the parables against the grain. This strategy is found in approaches coming from the social sciences and from social history,

72 For example, Stephen I. Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller* (London: SPCK, 2014), 73–75.

73 Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 211–212; Derret, *Law in the New Testament*, 33–45; Borsch, *Many Things in Parables*, 91 and 93; Van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 177.

74 Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 76.

75 Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 73–74. Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 30, interprets the king’s benevolence as hyperbole and downplays the punishment. Van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 170, opts to omit Matt 18:34.

76 Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 242–243.

77 The literal meaning of διχοτομέω is “cut in two.” The exact nature of the punishment is uncertain, other than being divided in half by some means (see, e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 8:31).

78 Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 57; Manson, *Sayings of Jesus*, 118; Otto Betz, “The Dichotomized Servant and the End of Judas Iscariot (Light on dark Passages: Matthew 24,51 and Parallel; Acts 1,8),” *RevQ* 5 (1964): 45. Against Betz: Kathleen Weber, “Is there a Qumran Parallel to Matthew 24,1//Luke 12,46?” *RevQ* 16 (1995): 657–663.

79 Alfons Weiser, *Die Knechtsgleichnisse der synoptischen Evangelien*, SANT 29 (Munich: Kösel, 1971), 196–197.

80 Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 100; Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, 158–161.

81 Scott, *Hear then the Parable*, 210–211; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 191; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 503–504.

82 Cf. 2 Macc 5:2, 5:24, 6:9, and 8:24.

83 John Duncan Derrett, “A Horrid Passage in Luke Explained (Lk 19:27),” *ExpTim* 97 (1986): 136–138. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 540–541. See Brian Schultz, “Jesus as Archelaus in the Parable of the Pounds (Lk. 19:11–27),” *NovT* 49 (2007): 112.

often together with a liberation theology, and interprets the narrative as realistic, but faults tradition for having identified the king/master in the parables as God. Read against the grain, the king then becomes a counter-example of God.<sup>84</sup> The ideological criticism is not directed at the content in the parables, but at historical circumstances to which the parables object.

The examples from the paragraph above show the trouble of reconciling the violence in the parables with theories about the parables and Jesus. The violence seems incoherent with the message and theology of Jesus and creates a tension that is resolved by distancing the violence from Jesus. For example, giving an oriental context for the unsavoury parts in the parables creates a distance from Jesus's daily life. My criticism of the attempts to dislodge the violence from the parables of Jesus does not mean that I believe the violence to be realistic; I would suggest that the vengeful punishments should be interpreted as eschatological retribution on the enemies of the kingdom of God.<sup>85</sup> For instance, "evil" slaves about to get due punishment is a stock motif in the ancient literary imagination, and similar tropes appear in rabbinic parables.<sup>86</sup> The parables simply represent the ideology of the sovereign and his power to mandate violent retribution to opposition. The narratives justify violence against enemies.<sup>87</sup> For this reason, I believe it is necessary to resort to ideological criticism of the parables. It does not suffice simply to divert the attention from these aspects of the parables.

#### 4 Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to show the problems of the concept of realism as it appears in parable studies or research. First, I demonstrated that the concept of realism has its roots in a theological understanding of Jesus's relation

84 Scott, *Hear then the Parable*, 276–280; Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 140–149; Warren Carter, "Resisting and Imitating the Empire: Imperial Paradigms in Two Matthean Parables," *Int* 56 (2002): 260–272; Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, 41–45, 175–177, and 220; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 72 and 102–103; and Van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean*, 296–299.

85 For a discussion of eschatological vengeance, see John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence in," *JBL* 122 (2003): 3–21.

86 Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 346–362.

87 The problem with violence is not solved with a metaphorical interpretation or by relegating the violence to an eschatological future; see Barbara E. Reid, "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 253–255, and David J. Neville, "Toward a Teleology of Peace: Contesting Matthew's Violent Eschatology," *JNST* 30 (2007): 134.

to his social environment, and in an arbitrary differentiation between Jesus's parables on the one hand and fables and rabbinic parables on the other, as well as in a bias against Jewish groups. Second, the idea that parables represent the past reality as it is or as Jesus saw it leads to an understanding of representation that bypasses the inherent problems of reconstructing and interpreting that past reality. Third, I showed how scholars have wrestled to reconcile violence in the parables with their alleged realism. What, then, are the overall conclusions to be drawn from this discussion?

The parables continue to generate new research, new perspectives, and new interpretations. Realism has been a vehicle used in support of the exceptionalism of Jesus and his parables. I hope that my discussion contributes to the dismantling of this exceptionalism. The connection between Jesus and the parables is inevitably linked to the virtual absence of direct comparative sources.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, Jesus's parables do likely have an antecedent in the Hebrew tradition and share thematic and structural similarities with the rabbinic parables, which were recorded later. The parables are narrative fictions that belonged to the oral/literary imagination of ancient people. Parables are like fables, probably familiar and traditional stories with a pedagogical purpose, which "appealed" to large groups of the population. This suggests a certain kind of accessibility for the parables: they had to be familiar and precise enough to be understood by those listening.<sup>89</sup> Such familiarity must depend on real-life descriptions, but also on traditional motifs and stock characters. The parables are meaningful for listeners/readers in several contexts; their meaning is not bound to one context. If the parables were traditional material that circulated orally within a broad geographical place, they would reveal little about a specific historical context or their author. The parables of Jesus are not different from other comparable narratives by virtue of their realism, exceptional quality, or theological content. Rather, it is their incorporation into the Christian tradition that distinguishes them. On their own, the New Testament parables appear generic—but their ties to Jesus have turned them into vehicles of great spiritual truths to the detriment of our understanding of them. A first step forward for parable interpretation would be to displace Jesus as the author. The second step would be to abandon the colloquial use of realism in the parables.

---

88 Craig A. Evans, "Parables in Early Judaism," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 51–75.

89 Mary Ann Beavis, "Parable and Fable," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 473–498.



## Bibliography

- Anderson, Garwood. "Parables." Pages 651–653 in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.
- Arnot, William. *The Parables of Our Lord*. London: Nelson, 1893.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." Pages 49–55 in *The Rustle of Language*. Edited by Roland Barthes. Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Discourse of History." Pages 127–140 in *The Rustle of Language*. Edited by Roland Barthes. Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Reality Effect." Pages 142–148 in *The Rustle of Language*. Edited by Roland Barthes. Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Baur, Ferdinand Christian. *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*. Translated by Allan Menzies. 2 vols. 3rd ed. London: William and Norgate, 1878.
- Beavis, Mary Ann. "Parable and Fable." *CBQ* 52 (1990): 473–498.
- Betz, Otto. "The Dichotomized Servant and the End of Judas Iscariot (Light on dark Passages: Matthew 24,51 and Parallel; Acts 1,8)." *RevQ* 5 (1964): 43–58.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Interpreting the Parables*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990.
- Borsch, Frederick H. *Many Things in Parables: Extravagant Stories of New Community*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.
- Bruce, Alexander B. *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ: A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of Our Lord*. 4th rev. ed. New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1886.
- Bugge, Christian August. *Die Haupt-Parabeln Jesu: Mit einer Einleitung über die Methode der Parabelauslegung*. Giessen: Ricker/Töpelmann, 1903.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*. 2nd ed. FRLANT 29. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931.
- Cadoux, Arthur T. *The Parables of Jesus: Their Art and Use*. New York: MacMillan, 1931.
- Carter, Warren. "Resisting and Imitating the Empire: Imperial Paradigms in Two Matthean Parables." *Int* 56 (2002): 260–272.
- Chilton, Bruce D. "Parables." Pages 253–254 in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*. Edited by Stanley E. Porter. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Collins, John J. "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence in." *JBL* 122 (2003): 3–21.
- Collins, John J. *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

- Crossan, John Dominic. *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*. Niles: Argus Communications, 1975.
- Crossan, John Dominic. *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*. Sonoma: Polebridge, 1992.
- Crossan, John Dominic. "Parables." Pages 5: 146–152 in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by Noel David Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Crossan, John Dominic. "Parables." Pages 804–806 in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. Edited by Paul J. Achtemeier. Rev. ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996.
- Cuddon, John Anthony et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 5th ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Derrett, John Duncan M. *Law in the New Testament*. London: Darton, Longman & Dodd, 1970.
- Derrett, John Duncan M. "A Horrid Passage in Luke Explained (Lk 19:27)." *ExpTim* 97 (1986): 136–138.
- Dodd, Charles H. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. Rev. ed. London: Collins, 1978.
- Donahue, John R. *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.
- Dibelius, Martin. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Translated by Bertram Lee Woolf. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1935.
- Dunn, James D.G. *Christianity in the Making, Volume 1: Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Van Eck, Ernest. *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016.
- Fiebig, Paul. *Altjüdische Gleichnisse und die Gleichnisse Jesu*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by Alan M. Sheridan Smith. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author." Pages 101–120 in *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Fuchs, Ernst. *Studies of the Historical Jesus*. SHT 42. London: SCM, 1964.
- Funk, Robert W. *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Funk, Robert W. *Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982.
- Goebel, Siegfried. *The Parables of Jesus: A Methodical Exposition*. Translated by Louis A. Banks. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890.
- Harnack, Adolf von. *What Is Christianity?* Translated by Thomas Bailey Saunders. 2nd rev. ed. New York: Putnam's Sons, 1908.
- Harrington, Daniel J. "Parables." Pages 115–116 in *Historical Dictionary of Jesus*. Edited by Daniel J. Harrington. HDRPM 102. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010.

- Hedrick, Charles W. *Parables as Poetic Fiction: The Creative Voice of Jesus*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994.
- Hedrick, Charles W. *Many Things in Parables: Jesus and His Modern Critics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.
- Hedrick, Charles W. "Survivors of the Crucifixion. Searching for the Profiles in the Parables." Pages 165–178 in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*. Edited by Ruben Zimmermann. WUNT 231. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- Herzog, William R. *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994.
- Hezser, Catherine. *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2005.
- Huffman, Norman A. "Atypical Features in the Parables of Jesus." *JBL* 97 (1978): 207–220.
- Hultgren, Arland J. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Hunter, Archibald M. *Interpreting the Parables*. 4th ed. London: SCM, 1972.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *The parables of Jesus*. Translated by Samuel Henry Hooke. 3rd rev. ed. London: SCM, 1972.
- Jones, Geraint Vaughan. *The Art and Truth of the Parables: A Study in Their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation*. London: SPCK, 1964.
- Jülicher, Adolf. *Die Gleichisreden Jesu*. 2 vols. Freiburg: Mohr, 1888.
- Kloppenborg, John S. "The Representation of Violence in Synoptic Parables." Pages 323–351 in *Mark and Matthew 1: Comparative Readings: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in Their First-Century Settings*. Edited by Anders Runesson and Eve-Marie Becker. WUNT 271. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.
- Kloppenborg, John S. "The Parable of the Burglar in Q: Insights from Papyrology." Pages 287–306 in *Metaphor, Narrative, and Parables in Q*. Edited by Dieter T. Roth, Ruben Zimmermann, and Michael Labahn. WUNT 315. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.
- Linnemann, Eta. *The Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*. Translated by John Sturdy. London: SPCK, 1966.
- Manson, Thomas W. *Sayings of Jesus: As Recorded in the Gospels According to St. Mathew and St. Luke*. 7th ed. London: SCM, 1977.
- Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew*. Vol. 5. *Probing the Authenticity of the Parables*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Mounce, William D. *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- Neville, David J. "Toward a Teleology of Peace: Contesting Matthew's Violent Eschatology." *JSNT* 30 (2007): 131–161.
- Oakman, Douglas E. "Was Jesus a Peasant? Implications for Reading the Samaritan Story (Luke 10:30–35)." *BTB* 22 (1992): 117–125.

- Oesterley, William. *The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background*. New York: MacMillan, 1936.
- Parris, David P. "Imitating the Parables: Allegory, Narrative and the Role of Mimesis." *JSNT* 25 (2002): 33–53.
- Perrin, Norman. *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976.
- Reid, Barbara E. "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence." *CBQ* 66 (2004): 253–255.
- Renan, Ernest. *Renan's Life of Jesus*. Translated by William G. Hutchison. London: Walter Scott, 1897.
- Renan, Ernest. *The History of the Origins of Christianity*. Vol. 5. *The Gospels*. London: Mathieson, 1890.
- Rindge, Matthew C. "Luke's Artistic Parables: Narratives of Subversion, Imagination, and Transformation." *Int* 68 (2014): 403–415.
- Robinson, Willard H. *The Parables of Jesus in Relation to His Ministry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928.
- Rohrbaugh, Richard. "A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror?" *BTB* 23 (1993): 32–39.
- Schottroff, Luise. *The Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.
- Schweitzer, Albert. *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*. Translated by W. Montgomery. 2nd ed. London: Black, 1911.
- Scott, Bernard Brandon. *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.
- Shillington, V. George, ed. *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting the Parables of Jesus Today*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997.
- Smith, Charles W.F. *The Jesus of the Parables*. Rev. ed. Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1975.
- Snodgrass, Klyne R. "Reading to Hear: A Hermeneutics of Hearing." *HBT* 24 (2002): 1–32.
- Snodgrass, Klyne R. "Prophets, Parables, and Theologians." *BTB* 18 (2008): 45–77.
- Snodgrass, Klyne R. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Strauss, David Friedrich. *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk*. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1864.
- Tolbert, Mary Ann. *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiples Interpretations*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.
- Trench, Richard C. *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*. 14th ed. London: MacMillan, 1882.
- Via, Dan O. *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.
- Weber, Kathleen. "Is there a Qumran Parallel to Matthew 24,1//Luke 12,46?" *RevQ* 16 (1995): 657–663.

- Weiss, Bernhard. *The Life of Christ*. Translated by John Walter Hope. 3 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1883.
- Weiss, Johannes. *Jesus's Proclamation of the Kingdom*. Translated by Richard Hyde Hiers and David Larrimore Holland. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985.
- Wilder, Amos N. *Early Christian Rhetoric; The Language of the Gospel*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Wolfreys, Julian, Ruth Robbins, and Kenneth Womack. *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Wright, Stephen I. "Parables." Pages 559–564 in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Wright, Stephen I. *Jesus the Storyteller*. London: SPCK, 2014.
- Zimmermann, Ruben. *Puzzling the Parables: Methods and Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.