READING ALLEGORIES OF CONTEXT

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Introduction

An era of historical critical engagement with synoptic gospel parables conscientiously sought to avoid the excesses of "artificial" allegorical interpretations. However, this tradition also developed a palimpsest of hypothetical readings of context. My thesis is that parables were inevitably framed by some form of hypothesis of context, unwittingly shifting the site of allegorical interpretation from text to context, in a reading allegory of gospel narrative and its specific provenance. Allegory, then, was potentially constructed at two sites - a text interpreted through its diverse signifying details or a text interpreted through a hypothetical context. Recognition, then, of the hypothetical and synthetic nature of contexts, is a basis for recognising that parable readings are always allegorical to some degree, whether such allegory is generated from a text or an assumed context. Allegory has been understood, predominantly, in the tradition of literal and non-literary categories.1 This thesis, however, is contingent on understanding allegory as explicating the ineluctable gap

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1 From Origen, Cassian, and Augustine to the Medieval period, four senses of Scripture were generally maintained: literal, allegorical, moral/topological, and analogical. Despite variations in the way the sense of Scripture was articulated, medieval hermeneutics maintained a “basic division between literal and spiritual”, the “spiritual sense” dependent on the “literal sense”. Before “a new interest in the literal sense in the Thirteenth century”, earlier spiritual interpretations had discounted the literal sense as a mere “husk”. So J. Hilary Martin, “The Four Senses of Scripture: Lessons from the Thirteenth Century,” Pacifica 2 (1989) 87-96 (87-106); see also Marjorie Reeves, “The Bible and Literary Authorship in the Middle Ages,” Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory, edited by Stephen Prickett (Oxford, UK and Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell, 1991) 12-63, here: 16-17.
between signifiers and signification in language, suggesting that reading is always *reading otherwise.* As a literary trope, allegory highlights or dramatises the “disjunction” between “subject” and “predicate” necessary for language and meaning. Allegory also makes apparent a discontinuity between a written artefact and the construction of meaning beyond the material text. Allegory, in this sense, suggests any generation of interpretation from textuality beyond the “surface” of words on paper. Allegory arises because unequivocal meaning cannot be established on a literal or “normative” reading of a text. Meaning is not present in a text, but rather, meaning is generated beyond a written text, and allegory makes explicit this movement per se. This is a dynamic that occurs in reading through interpreting the words of a text, or alternatively, by positing a context for interpreting a text.

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Castelli, “Allegories of Hagar,” 235-41. “[E]very attempt at entering the world of the text, or seeing the text as mirroring our world and reflecting it back to us, involves some degree of allegory” - so Young, “Allegory,” 117.

Exegetical and theological interpretation of texts beyond the literal words on paper is an.
particularly evident in reading parables. Synoptic gospel parables suggest more than either their words connote or their narrative framings permit, which in turn generates hypotheses of context for the purpose of meaningful reading. We might refer to such hypotheses of context with greater awareness and integrity as implicit reading allegories - hypotheses structuring particular interpretations.

This article evaluates, first, the propensity for parables to generate hypotheses of context; second, the paradox of resistance to explicit allegory while also invoking implicit allegory as an interpretive method; and third, the thesis that reading is an implicit allegorising activity in general, which is accentuated in interpreting parables from hypotheses of context in particular.

Parable interpretation and the quest for context

Interpretive approaches to the phenomenon of dissonance between several parables and their frames have been varied. Some scholars attempted to eliminate this dissonance by seeking an intrinsic unity between a parable and its frame, with dissonance being an interpretive difficulty to be smoothed over. Others affirmed the dissonances, assuming that parable and frame belonged to different traditions, with the parable being the earlier tradition, and speculated on theological, redactive reasons for the dissonance. Form critical method sought to recover the original setting and meaning of a parable in the ministry of the historical Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God, before a parable’s interpretation in gospel tradition.


8 No context can be saturated with all the relevant performative detail, if it is known, and therefore determined beyond question; and “[n]o context can determine meaning to the point of exhaustiveness.” Saturation of context with all the relevant data, is a historicist’s dream. However, it is a condition of writing to be able to break with context. So Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1993) 9, “Signature Event Context,” trans. A. Bass, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 309-310, 317 (309-330).


critical method sought to understand the theological modification and framing of parables within their existing gospel contexts. The parables of Jesus without their frames were assumed to be integral to the message of the historical Jesus, with the frames belonging to later gospel tradition. Parable scholars of the New Hermeneutic also held that existing gospel interpretations are secondary to an independent parable form that was indicative of a unique use of language by the historical Jesus. The interpretive task of the New Hermeneutic was to retrieve the performative sense of this first “language event” in disclosing a new perspective on reality that challenged listeners to decision and engagement with authentic being. More recently, parables have been interpreted from gospels as their first literary and therefore primary interpretive matrix. Tensions between the enigmatic nature of parables and their gospel contexts were well known before contemporary literary theories demonstrated the propensity of texts to generate surplus meaning that contests or fractures their literary framing.

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14 Linnemann, Parables of Jesus, 30-33, developed the concept of “language event” in parable from Fuchs’ concept of “Sprachereignis (language event)” (Ernst Fuchs, Hermeneutik, 1963). See also Perrin, Language of the Kingdom, 43.


16 Many of the same parables in the synoptic gospels have different contexts or frames, while single occurrence parables are often at odds with their context or have inconsistent interpretations attached to them. Mary Ann Tolbert, Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 54-62.
The quest for a pure rendition of parable before its embedding in gospel narrative, uncontaminated by interpretive framing, has generated diverse results pertaining to the precise composition of parables, including their endings and therefore their interpretation. At the most elementary level of framing theory, parables are stitched into narratives with introductions and conclusions, which effectively circumscribes their interpretation. The impossibility of reaching the original verbatim parable, which is always a hypothetical construction, produced multiple readings of parables and diverse possible historical and social settings. Hence, some interpreters subsequently cited gospel narrative - a particular rather than hypothetical context, as the appropriate matrix of parable interpretation. Accordingly, the synoptic gospels provide an accessible interpretive treatment of parables, with any treatment of the parables of Jesus in the oral tradition ultimately being hypothetical. As the first hermeneutical treatment of the parables, the parables of Jesus are essentially parables of a particular gospel.

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18 Tolbert, *Parables*, 18-23. Donahue, *Parable*, reflects this ambivalence: in allegory, “interpretation of [parables] is determined not by their original context or meaning but by the way they function as coded language to illustrate the already held beliefs of the interpreter” (11). Yet Donahue could also say that the “original context of the parables is irretrievable [. . .].” (24-25). “The criterion of proper interpretation is not the genre chosen but whether the interpretation is faithful to the original meaning and context(s) of the parable.” [A small admission here, with the addition of “(s)” to “context.”] (12).

19 The quest is necessary and impossible. According to John P. Meier, “The Historical Jesus: Rethinking Some Concepts,” *TS* 51 (1990) 3-24, research into the historical Jesus (including extant words and actions) subverts scholarly constructs made of the historical Jesus. The enigmatic figure of Jesus keeps resisting a definitive portrayal and therefore theology. The research programs are compelled and subverted by this perennial outcome. Each gospel presents a different rationale for Jesus speaking in parables (Mark 4:10-13; Matt 13:10-17; Luke 8:9-10).

20 Parables and gospel become inseparable in terms of the mutual effects on interpretation of either - so Donahue, *Parable*, 3-4, 25-27. Being written, a parable becomes a different discourse in a different context from an anterior spoken event. It has the possibility of being reinscribed, either with new and creative performative readings of an existing score akin to the relationship between music and musical performance, or by becoming an artefact that is remade into further texts. See Robert P. Scharlemann, “Theological Text,” *Semteia* 40 (1987) 5-19, here: 8, 14; also Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) 75-79.
Gospel narrative as an interpretive context for parables is constructed in multiple ways - sociologically, politically, and ecclesiastically, as diverse interpretive approaches to synoptic gospels demonstrate. That is, how gospel narrative is read, determines the interpretations of particular parables, especially those unique to one gospel. Hypotheses of gospel context are inevitably put forward in *best case scenarios* of provenance. Such readings are proffered in order to secure interpretive control, one contextual scenario being in competition with others, without definitive adjudication.\(^{21}\)

They are literary, anthropological, and theological constructions of context, a metatext that can adjudicate on a definitive interpretation of the text.\(^{22}\) This hermeneutical procedure of synthetising selected "features" of a text as a controlling motif for interpretation, is never absent from readings.\(^{23}\) However, the possible syntheses of context are not only infinite, they are structurally inevitable. An interpreter seeks to establish a convergence of horizons, ancient and contemporary, which will enable the text to be meaningful. Yet the gap is ultimately unbridgeable. The horizons might almost converge, but never finally merge.\(^{24}\)

\(^{21}\) Readings are constrained by specific conventions or procedures of interpretation within particular communities, these conventions varying from one community to another. This accounts for interpretive stability and variation. Robert B. Robinson, "Wife and Sister Through the Ages: Textual Determinacy and the History of Interpretation," *Semeia* 62 (1993) 103-28, here: 125-27.

\(^{22}\) George Aichele, *Jesus Framed: Biblical Limits* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 75-98, describes the tension between parable and frame as a relationship between text and meta-text, the meta-text existing as a means of interpretive control over the text (in this instance, parable).


Resistance to allegory and allegory as interpretive method

Parables are capable of generating surplus of meaning that solicits interpretations beyond their first interpretive contexts. The gospels as first hermeneutical contexts of parables were replaced by allegories when gospel tradition became canonically fixed.25 Surplus had to be handled in a new way. Allegory was eventually eclipsed by historical critical methodology, which sought to outline the original setting and milieu of parables, generating hypothetical interpretations of any parable.26 The single point interpretation of parables, in which parables were assumed to make only one point, was prevalent from Jülicher to Dodd,27 but this approach had the effect of developing a palimpsest tradition of hypothetical readings of context. C. H. Dodd’s method of parable interpretation provided an intriguing glimpse into an unwitting admission of allegory at the very centre of method that sought to exclude allegory. Dodd’s resistance to allegory in the signifying particulars of a text (“each term [is] a cryptogram for an idea, so that the whole [is] to be de-coded term by term”28), and his implicit instating of allegory in method, was already present in Spinoza, when the latter sought to interpret texts according to rational criteria alone. “Spinoza, in effect, restores the hermeneutical condition of allegory in which one rationalises the alien text or naturalises it within a prevailing philosophical outlook.”29 Dodd was committed to an a priori perspective of parables as reasonable and realistic, consistent with

25 Tolbert, Parables, 63-64. In noting that texts have no definable limits of interpretation, Frank Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) suggested that allegory was a “patristic way of dealing with inexhaustible hermeneutical potential” (44).


28 Dodd, Parables, 13. The central issue here is not simply that Dodd rejected certain types of “fanciful” allegory, but that allegory per se is based on the signifying particulars of a text, an interpretive practice that should not be admissible.

29 Gerald Bruns, Hermeneutics, Ancient and Modern (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 148-49, citing Spinoza’s Tractatus Theologico-Philosophicus (1670) 112-113. Young, “Allegory,” 116-117, makes a similar observation - the “historico-critical reading […] may be regarded as in some sense allegorical in that it enabled the domestication of ancient texts to modern apologetic needs”. Similarly, Tolbert, Parables, 64.
natural order. He rejected the thought of parables generating mystery (after apocalyptic literature, which is implicated in allegory - “apocalypists can give us only frigid allegories”), and instead, asserted the realism and reasonableness of parables.

While recognising that allegorical interpretation of parables before Jülicher had some legitimacy in the use of parables by the early church, Dodd proceeded to construct a method of interpretation that excluded the mystifications of allegory. Dodd cited the Hellenistic milieu as the cradle of allegorical interpretation of parables due to the pervasive ethos of allegorically interpreted myths, while in the Jewish milieu, parables were used as illustrations for teaching. Dodd claimed that the parables of Jesus were truths expressed in concrete images, drawn from the natural world. In his rejection of allegory as a “mystification” of parable, however, he left open a small aperture of interpretive space for plural, metaphorical modes of interpreting parables - in short, new forms of allegory:

At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.

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30 “In the parables of the Gospels [. . .] all is true to nature and to life. Each similitude or story is a perfect picture of something that can be observed in the world of our experience.” Further, “the Kingdom of God is intrinsically like the process of nature and of the daily life of men.” Hence, “[s]ince nature and super-nature are one order, you can take any part of that order and find in it illumination for other parts.” Where it occurs in the gospels, allegory “has intruded itself into a parable and marred its realism” (Dodd, Parables, 19-20).

31 On the rationale for teaching in parables generating mystery (Mark 4) - “that He desired not to be understood by the people in general, and therefore clothed His teaching in intelligible forms, cannot be made credible on any reasonable reading of the Gospels” (Dodd, Parables, 15). Although Dodd also concedes “that the Gospels themselves give encouragement to this allegorical method of interpretation” (14).

32 Dodd, Parables, 21.

33 Dodd suggested that “while the allegory is a merely decorative illustration of teaching supposed to be accepted on other grounds, the parable has the character of an argument [.]” for a decision in the context of crisis or challenge (Dodd, Parables, 21).

34 Dodd, Parables, 13, 16.

35 Dodd, Parables, 16.

36 Dodd, Parables, 16 (my emphasis).
While allegory was once resisted as an interpretive method, each new methodology for reading parables after Dodd, became a form of allegory or reading construction. Hence, a non-allegorising parable interpreter constructed his or her own allegory of single point per parable interpretation. While the one point assertion was made, Dodd also inadvertently gave space for allegorical elaboration. He failed to recognise that a "judgement on the imagined situation" is an interpretive construction or reading allegory that parallels in method, attempts to decode the constituent parts of a story. It is merely working from the other end. An allegorically constructed context was used to deliver a single point referent of parables. In this way, allegory could be constructed at two locales - the text interpreted through its diverse signifying details or a text interpreted through a hypothetical context. Dodd chose the implicit allegory of the second in resistance to the explicit allegories of the first, but by so doing, read the single point referent as an allegory derived from a synthetically constructed context. Dodd’s resistance to decoding the signifying details of a story was replaced by decoding the signifying details of context. These could be textual and extra-textual (through the prism of imagination).

Dodd’s principles of interpretation continued to constitute the allegorical construction of context through which parables, and the "original meaning and application" of parables were frequently read:

(i) The clue must be found, not in ideas which developed only with the experience of the early Church, but in such ideas as may be supposed to have been in the minds of the hearers of Jesus during His ministry. Our best guide to such ideas will often be the Old Testament, with which they may be presumed to have been familiar. [...] (ii) The meaning which we attribute to the parable must be congruous with the interpretation of His own ministry offered by Jesus in explicit and unambiguous sayings, so far as such sayings are known to us; and in any case it must be such as to fit the general view of His teaching to which a study of the non-parabolic sayings leads.

Dodd’s method involved many uncertainties such as - the state of the hearers’ minds, their interpretation of Old Testament motifs, self-understanding or interpretation

37 Kermode, Genesis of Secrecy, 44.
38 Dodd, Parables, 17-18. "We should expect the parables to bear upon the actual and critical situation in which Jesus and His hearers stood; and when we ask after their application, we must look first, not to the field of general principles, but to the particular setting in which they were delivered. The task of the interpreter of the parables is to find out, if he can, the setting of a parable in the situation contemplated by the Gospels, and hence the application which would suggest itself to one who stood in that situation" (23).
of Jesus’ ministry, correct rendering of sayings assumed to be unambiguous, a consensus on Jesus’ teaching, and an evaluation of non parabolic sayings. A tall order! There were too many uncertain variants underpinning Dodd’s one point reading of a parable.\(^{40}\) By constructing a constellation of presumed invariable motifs (the purpose of his statement above), Dodd fabricated an elaborate but implicit contextual allegory from highly variable motifs. Instead of parables being interpreted allegorically, a complex allegory of Sitz im Leben was constructed with a view to explicating a circumscribed interpretation of parables. This was problematic, however, when many versions of a parable’s Sitz im Leben abounded, and appeared to reflect the hermeneutical assumptions of scholars rather than a retrievable setting in life for any parable’s specific origins.\(^{41}\)

Dodd’s resistance to allegory, then, was not sustained by later interpreters, who also assumed some form of contextual understanding (or allegory of context) in order to interpret parables. Scholars such as Via, Perrin, Crossan, Funk, and Donahue have variously resisted allegory pace Dodd’s rejection of explicit allegory, while forging their own implicit allegories of context.\(^{42}\) The quest for context in resistance to allegory

\(^{39}\) Dodd, Parables, 27 (my emphasis).

\(^{40}\) The very conditions for Dodd’s allegorical context by conceding that the “concrete circumstances” or “occasion” of the parables within Jesus’ life eludes us. Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991) 169-70.

\(^{41}\) Barr, “ Allegory and Historicism,” notes that “[h]istorical analysis is not an objective science but produces only hypothetical reconstructions of what might have been the case,” and that “[f]ar from being scientifically objective, historical analysis may be heavily indebted to ideological factors” (106). On the fallacy of compounding hypotheses in parable reconstruction, see John W. Sider, “Rediscovering the Parables,” JBL 102 (1983) 61-83.

\(^{42}\) Via, Parables, developed a synthesis of criteria for interpretation, which was also an unrecognised allegory of context in suggesting that, “to understand Jesus’ parables it is essential to recover and reconstruct the precise, concrete situation in which the parable was uttered and to know what ideas were being illustrated. Beyond this it may be claimed that a right understanding of the parables requires a knowledge of the thoughts, ideas, and value judgments operative in the hearers as well as a knowledge of the author’s position” (18), citing Jeremias, Parables, 22, 169. Under the rubric of historical criticism, Perrin, Language of the Kingdom, discussed the importance of establishing “the circumstances in which and for which [a text] was written. We need, further, to understand as far as we can the intent of the author in writing the text, and the meaning understood by those for whom the text was written” (3-4). Crossan, “Parable and Example,” also established an allegory of context when he argued that the meaning of a parable is ascertained by establishing the
simply developed new methods of allegorical reading, working with context instead of text (even if this was assumed to be working from the text as such). Ironically, Dodd’s comments on metaphor provided the impetus to explore metaphorical polysemy, in contrast to the single point interpretation of parables. The reading of parables has not turned full circle since Jülicher, but it has formed an ellipsis vis-à-vis allegory. In the face of polysemy in meaning, the allegorising character of reading, whether political or playful, is an accepted method of interpretation. Recent re-readings of familiar biblical texts are regarded predominantly, as self-conscious, reader-oriented interpretations, whether they are made with or against the assumed natural

content of Jesus’ teaching that is not parabolic teaching (86-87), and the way Jesus is interpreted significantly determines the interpretation of parables (96 n. 39). In a similar way Funk, Language, argued for interpretive “control,” citing “[t]he direction in which Jesus aims the parable and the particular context in which it is heard have everything to do with its original meaning” (151 n. 80 - my emphasis). More recently, and referring to Luke’s Parables, Donahue, Parable, cites “original context or meaning” as necessary for interpretation in resistance to allegory (11-12).

Funk, Language, worked from Dodd’s description of the parable genre as “a metaphor or simile ... leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought” to develop a thoroughly metaphorical theory of parables. His reference to Dodd is one of the most noted in parable scholarship (133-162). See also Perrin, “Modern Interpretation of the Parables,” 139-141; Funk Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996) 165-180. Donahue, Parable, 6-20, arranged an introduction to the metaphoricity of parables around the statement from Dodd.

The hermeneutical “problem of multiple meaning” is the source of allegory. Hence language, “while signifying one thing at the same time signifies another thing without ceasing to signify the first. In the proper sense of the word, it is the allegorical function (all-e-goreo: ‘while saying one thing to say another thing’)”—so Ricoeur, “The Problem of Double Meaning as Hermeneutic Problem and as a Semantic Problem,” trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics, edited by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) 62-78, here: 63-64. Scott, Parables, 45, writes: “Allegory’s openness to the multiple points of contact is more in line with polyvalency.” Herzog’s parable theory begins with an assumption that the synoptic gospel parables are a form of codification or allegory (9-14). Indeed, an explicit allegory (hypothesis) of context is unavoidable (14-16, 30-39). However, William R. Herzog II, Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed (Louisville, Kentucky: WJKP, 1994), suggested a particular reading allegory as “a Key to Understanding Jesus of Nazareth,” with distinct assertions about the historical Jesus and his use of parables (16-17, 25-29). His project is built on this hypothesis or reading allegory: parabolic “codifications” are developed from a particular synthesis of sociological, political, and
grain of texts.\textsuperscript{45} They are by varying degrees, self-aware readings or allegories - allegory being \textit{extra-textual}, making explicit the \textit{extra-textuality} of any reading.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Reading as implicit allegorising}

Critical readings are implicit allegories removed from a text, constructed from synthetic \textit{reading allegories of context}. Such allegories of context are usually a particular configuration of historical, sociological, political, anthropological, literary and theological formulations, each discipline representing an enormous range of synthetic possibilities, especially with ancient data and assumed audiences.\textsuperscript{47} Derrida speaks of a plurality of “entanglements” - historical, cultural, and political - a “knot”, which does not yield a singular meaning or understanding of origin.\textsuperscript{48} Adam points out that

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{45}] For example, see Adam, \textit{What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); or The Bible and Culture Collective, \textit{The Postmodern Bible} (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Pr., 1995). Young, “ Allegory,” 116, observes that “the development of ideological readings […] are forms of allegory”.
\item[\textsuperscript{46}] Hence, Stephen Moore, “Narrative Commentaries on the Bible: Context, Roots, and Prospects,” \textit{Forum} 3.3 (1987) 29-62, here: 56, refers to the necessity of engaging in “commentary on commentary”.
\item[\textsuperscript{47}] Adam points out that “implied audiences” attributed to biblical writings are dependent on synthetic configurations or allegories of social and historical context. Adam, “The Future of Our Allusions,” 9-11.
\item[\textsuperscript{48}] Derrida, “Mnemosyne,” 14-15.
\end{itemize}
“implied audiences” attributed to biblical writings are dependent on synthetic configurations of social and historical context.\textsuperscript{49} The variations with which diverse disciplines for reading context can be invoked, in terms of method, to construct a particular reading of gospel context, are theoretically infinite. Complexity in origin calls forth complexity of method. With what hypothesis, then, will these components be configured, with what determining metaphors,\textsuperscript{50} and in whose interests?\textsuperscript{51}

Parable interpretations rely on methodology assumptions, presuppositions and interests that are exhibited in the construction of contexts. Such constructions also represent a quest either to control the limits of interpretation or to give contingent force to a particular reading. Parable contexts, anterior to, or within gospels, are a synthesis of diverse disciplines, the potential interfaces also being determined by sub-disciplines within disciplines and various criteria for weighting their relative significance. The selection of interpretive context, it seems, is as much arbitrary and contingent, as it is free and altruistic.\textsuperscript{52} A consequence of this is that interpretation is already “parabolic,” even as it begins to read a parable.\textsuperscript{53} This recognition is an allegorical movement that makes explicit the combination of text and reading strategy in effecting a particular meaning.\textsuperscript{54} Interpretation, with its prisms of method and context, effectively introduces and combines extrinsic material with a text, and by doing so


\textsuperscript{50} Context is shaped by the controlling metaphors of a synthetic milieu. So Fred W. Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis: The Eve of Historical Criticism,” \textit{Semeia} 51 (1990) 51-80, here: 63-64.

\textsuperscript{51} Social, political contexts of biblical texts are not only synthetically constructed, but such discourses are always situated in institutions, with their own intra-discursive struggles and hierarchies that modulate the claims for context, and therefore interpretation of texts. Hence the context of interpretive voice is a factor in the meaning of texts. So Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 65-72. Also see Adam, “The Sign of Jonah: A Fish-Eye View,” \textit{Semeia} 51 (1990) 177-191, here: 177-81, 186-87. Referring to communal consensus of the context of texts, Burnett argues that consensus of context can only be adjudicated by the consensus itself, making the argument circular. Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 58-60.


\textsuperscript{54} Young, “Allegory,” 108.
also inscribes the possibility of repressing yet "other stories." The allegorical impetus, therefore, extends well beyond its traditionally ascribed parameters within the signifying details of texts per se. Reading functions in the same way as allegory, which Bruns suggests, mediates between worlds, sustaining a web of meaning in the complex configuration of reading, new reading contexts, and texts in their generic complexity, in which the truth of a text, is its configuration of understanding within a contextual web. Allegory as a blatantly demonstrative extra-textual practice, makes explicit the implicit extra-textual nature of such reading. Reading, whether consciously or otherwise, is the production of text that is not intrinsic to the words and sentences of a text per se in the attempt to “make sense” of the text - “[w]e map the text onto some other texts (or contexts or para-texts) in order to clarify it.” Hence, “interpretation involves making sense of the text in question [...] in terms of something the text isn’t.” To affirm a premise of the thesis that context is a reading allegory, then, any reading (of parables) is already an interpretive movement away from the surface of a text (its signifying details) and is therefore a reading allegory of that text (a contextual frame of reference).

Ambiguity and multiple interpretations are intrinsic to synoptic gospel parables. Parables are genres that can vacillate between continuity and dissonance with their immediate narrative contexts. The relationship between a parable and its frame is more subtle than redactive theories positing an earlier parable and a later gospel frame. The hermeneutical issue of surplus meaning potentially present in any text, especially those that generate explicit metaphorical claims such as parables, is an


issue encompassing both parable and frame. The point, then, is not to resist the allegorical reading of parables by arguing that allegory is a form of deviant, unauthorised interpretation of parables. Rather, the point is to recognize that any reading begins as a reading allegory, with some readings offered as better contingent readings than others (this could be either a literary or an ethical evaluation). By proposing an argument that any reading is implicitly allegorical, there is a possibility of freeing it from univocal reading, to generate another trajectory of meaning. This freedom does not exist from allegory per se, but from one particular reading allegory of either a parable, or its gospel narrative context and therefore framing. This phenomenon is certainly of ethical significance.

Parables, gospels, and their contexts of literary production can be read in diverse ways, with some readings having more endurance and communal usefulness than others. Nevertheless, each remains resistant to univocal reading. Alternative readings are always possible, reminding us that any reading is synthetically constructed, resistant to some previous reading, and in turn eventually resisted as a normative reading by others. The claim to “exegesis” over against “eisegesis” is ultimately contingent on a prejudice for one context and a pejorative resistance to alternative readings of a text - while my reading is exegesis, your reading is eisegesis, or one person’s exegesis is another person’s eisegesis. The appropriateness of any particular reading allegory, and therefore exegesis, is forged within a matrix of pragmatism, ethics, tradition, and communal contingency. Generating alternative reading allegories for a parable, then, is not only legitimate as an explicit activity of interpretation, it is also inevitable. Texts, consisting of words and sentences on white space, invite us to participate in the production of meaning. Disclosure of meaning does not occur in the empirical writing per se, but in the imaginative participation of the reader with a writing, which is a generation of meaning, through the generation of intangible texts that exist in a dynamic relationship between a reader and a writing. This relational site of text is contingent on a production of reading allegory or interpretive frame of reference - from either a written text or its assumed context.

59 Aichele, Jesus Framed, 75-98.
Conclusions

This article has evaluated the propensity for parables to generate hypotheses of context, and a paradox of resistance to explicit allegory while invoking implicit allegory as an interpretive method, especially as initiated by Dodd. In continuity with contemporary approaches to texts and interpretation, the article suggests that reading is an implicit allegorising activity in general, which is accentuated in interpreting parables and their contexts in particular.

We cannot avoid generating interpretations of either larger texts or parables, thereby invoking the allegorical generation of meaning from text as another reading. While recognizing this, the thesis of this article has sought to push understanding from the site of reading engagement to the construction of context. An interpreter’s construction or hypothesis of context - whether the context of parable anterior to gospel or the context of gospel - generates a particular reading of a text. While some readings might appear to have a high degree of sociological, political, historical, anthropological, or theological plausibility, they are nevertheless still constructions or synthetic readings. They are ineluctable reading allegories of context. Context is always forged out of some purpose and constellation of presuppositions - a synthetic context or reading allegory, which in turn is used to secure a certain reading of a text. Constructing reading allegories for parable interpretation is inevitable, given the possible variants involved in forging a hypothesis of context and contingent interpretation. Even readings of parables that seek to eliminate allegory, ultimately construct allegories of context to set limits on the scope of possible interpretation. Reading allegories are contingent on some hypothesis of context, whatever claims might be made for the intention of author or the context of a text. A particular reading is therefore only implied, not stated directly by the text. “Allegory” is an explicit description of an implicit construction of a reading allegory from a hypothesis of context. The explicit phenomenon of allegory is in one sense, an “owning up” to the incorrigible interpretive participation that occurs in reading texts and their contexts. Some readings will be stronger and more resilient than others, but one can not construct a definitive reading allegory from which to interpret a text, for the generation of alternative hypotheses of context is inevitable.