In her foreword to this collection of essays, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes that parable studies are a rich and abundant field of inquiry which is waiting to be harvested by feminist biblical critics. This volume is a significant contribution to wo/men and gender biblical studies which will change not only how we look at the parables of the gospels but also how we approach biblical interpretation. Searching for the “lost coin” of parables about wo/men will change not only how we understand parable texts but also how we go about reading them. . . . In short, this book will greatly contribute to the methodological and theoretical discussions underway in many areas of biblical studies. (15).

This reviewer tends to agree with her. Although I come from Hebrew Bible Studies, I have found much to ponder and enjoy in this collection.


Part 5 is titled “Finding Parable” and contains a single entry: Christin Lore Weber’s “Gathering: A Mythic Parable” (308–12), a creative parable/midrash that begins, classically, with “There was a woman...” and ends, appropriately for the book, with “On the edge where the world begins and ends, she planted the seedling tree.”

A composite bibliography and two indexes—for references and authors—are useful and well prepared (308–44).

I have reproduced this collection’s table of contents here in a fairly detailed manner for several reasons. First, because, as Beavis rightly states in her introduction (22–23), the relevant parables have received scant attention for their “womanly” contents and, consequently, for their general significance outside the pioneering work of Luise Schottroff and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Hence, the present collection fills a real gap, and its various constituents (individual essays by individual scholars) need to be emphasized. Second, which once again reflects conscious and in my opinion wise editorial policy, to make it clear how essays—especially in parts 1 and 2—would seem to overlap and thus be “in conversation” with each other. And third, to convey the coherence of the collection as a cohesive book that moves from “recovering” parables about/of women (1) to women’s economic activities (2), to their familial status (3), to Wisdom (4) and, finally, to a newly created “parable.” Of course, other groupings of
individual essays might have been possible, but this one makes sense to this reader. Moreover, I regard this volume as an important work of “human archaeology,” of not only “recovery” but also rediscovery, precisely in the vein of Schüssler Fiorenza’s foreword and without quibbling over details of interpretation (which is, once again, always possible to do).

It is difficult to single out individual contributions in such a collection for critical treatment; neither is it necessary, I think, in the present case, when much of the contribution is in the general topic chosen and in the amalgamated weight of it as a book. I will leave that to more informed New Testament readers. But for my part, and this is a matter of taste as well as of critical reflection, I liked most of all Beavis’s own “Joy of Heaven” and “Making Up Stories,” which stand in dialogue with each other, although I do not understand why the first (which is an addition/response to the second) is placed before the second. Finally, the editor allows individual contributors to use alternative spellings for “God” (31), according to their inclination. This reviewer is critical of such a decision in a scholarly work (to distinguish, for the purpose of the work, from any other context). However, this seems like a minor point by comparison to the anthology’s achievement.