

MICHAEL J. GILMOUR  
Providence College (Otterburne, Manitoba, Canada)

BOOK PROFILE: THE PARABLES OF DR. SEUSS,  
BY ROBERT SHORT

A review of Robert L. Short, *The Parables of Dr. Seuss*. Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. ix + 95 pp. ISBN: 9780664230470.

What an interesting idea for a book! It is not often that one comes across a study of the writings and illustrations of Theodor Seuss Geisel, particularly one focusing on its religious overtones. Robert L. Short's study of selected Dr. Seuss stories shows well-deserved respect for the children's book author by offering a form of commentary on selected texts, including such lesser-known stories as *The Lorax* and *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* and perennial favorites as *Green Eggs and Ham* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. This is not a detailed or technical commentary and the style of argumentation is often quite creative (see e.g., the conversation between New Testament passages and lines from Dr. Seuss stories in chapter 3). Readers, particularly those who abandoned the good doctor's work in adulthood, will enjoy the chance to revisit these wonderful tales.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this short book lies in the presentation of Ted Geisel as a writer possessing a remarkable depth, a depth easily and often overlooked. Short takes the well-known children's book writer seriously as a thinker, specifically a biblical thinker, and not merely as an inspired entertainer. Short identifies and challenges our tendency as readers to "see only a surface Seuss" (x) and neglect "a deeper Dr. Seuss" (xi). He approaches the stories "through the lens of Christian faith" and concludes that, "Ted Geisel was a first-class Christian thinker" who used his books to communicate his views (xi). On these points, Short presents a compelling case and the book is ultimately convincing.

At the same time, I have a few minor quibbles. For one thing, the constant citation of non-Seuss material seems superfluous and often strikes the reader as 'fill' rather than an integral part of the argument. For example, in place of the many biblical passages included, some of which are quite lengthy (e.g., 37, 75, 85-86), verse references or précis would suffice. The book leaves me wishing there was more analysis of the texts in question, particularly because the book is so short to begin with (it is under 100 pages).

My other concern is the clearly tendentious style of presentation. Readers should realize that *The Parables of Dr. Seuss* is no mere analysis of the Seuss canon. Short uses the Seuss stories, and his "hunch . . . that Dr. Seuss was profoundly Christian in his orientation" (xii), as a springboard for preaching. The eleven

chapters amount to eleven short sermons. The book constantly moves from an observation about a Seuss story to some kind of application or life lesson, or to explanations of what Paul or Jesus meant when they said this or that. These asides distract more than illuminate Dr. Seuss because ultimately Short is *using* the storyteller to forward his own ideas as often as he attempts to explicate *Green Eggs and Ham* or *Horton Hears a Who!* or *The Cat in the Hat*. It seems to me that if indeed Dr. Seuss articulates a Christian worldview – and I agree that he did – Short only needs to point his readers to this fact, not spell it out for them in his own sermons. How can you improve on *Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now!?* And why would you want to try?

MICHAEL J. GILMOUR teaches New Testament and English literature at Providence College in Manitoba, Canada. In addition to these two areas, his research interests include the intersections of religion and popular music, and he is currently writing a book on the subject for Baylor University Press.

©Michael Gilmour. All rights reserved.  
Gilmour, Michael. "Book Profile: The Parables of Dr. Seuss, by Robert Short," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 9 no. 3 (Fall 2008): 82-83.