Even if we succeed in substituting more egalitarian, interactive metaphors to describe the activities of egg and sperm, and manage to avoid the pitfalls of cybernetic models, we would still be guilty of endowing cellular entities with personhood. More crucial, then, than what *kinds* of personalities we bestow on cells is the very fact that we are doing it at all. This process could ultimately have the most disturbing social consequences. 36

One clear feminist challenge is to wake up sleeping metaphors in science, particularly those involved in descriptions of the egg and the sperm. Although the literary convention is to call such metaphors "dead," they are not so much dead as sleeping, hidden within the scientific content of texts—and all the more powerful for it.[71] Waking up such metaphors, by becoming aware of when we are projecting cultural imagery onto what we study, will improve our ability to investigate and understand nature. Waking up such metaphors, by becoming aware of their implications, will rob them of their power to naturalize our social conventions about gender. 37

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: ARGUING ABOUT METAPHORS IN SCIENCE

1. Martin's essay is divided into sections. What are they, and what is accomplished in each one?
2. Some of the instances of metaphors used in scientific journals gathered by Martin are quite striking. Choose one or two of these for group discussion.
3. Write a short piece in which you discuss what you learned about sexual reproduction in your early education and what Martin's essay teaches. Did she persuade you to rethink your understanding of these basic processes?
4. Using Emily Martin's approach as your model, examine a science textbook or another kind of textbook that discusses processes or historical or political events and examine a section of the text for sleeping metaphors and analogies. What cultural imagery do you find in these metaphors? That is, how does the writer want you to perceive the process or event?

HIDDEN MEANING: PARABLES AND ALLEGORY

When metaphorical thought is taken to an extreme of elaboration, we find whole stories that seem to be about one thing but are intended to convey a message about some other thing. These stories, if they are short, we usually call *parables,* and, if they are long, we call *allegories*—especially if they seem to convey messages about more than one hidden topic. Both of these words refer to the way that meaning is removed from the surface or hidden in the texts that they describe. Parables play a major role in Christian thinking because Jesus used them as a teaching device. In the following passage from the Gospel of Mark, we find not only a number of parables, but also a theory of parable being expounded to the inner circle of disciples, and a parable about parables. We ask you to begin thinking about parables by reading this passage and discussing the parables in it—especially that of the sower of seeds.

[71]Thanks to Elizabeth Fee and David Spain, who in February 1989 and April 1989, respectively, made points related to this.

The Parables of Jesus

The Gospel of Mark

Once again he began to teach beside the seashore. And the greatest multitude gathered to hear him, so that he went aboard the ship and was seated out to sea, and all the multitude was on shore facing the sea. He taught them a great deal in parables, and said to them in his discourse: Listen. Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened as he sowed that some of the grain fell beside the way, and birds came and ate it. Some fell on stony ground where there was not much soil, and it shot up quickly because there was no depth of soil; and when the sun came up it was parched and because it had no roots it dried away. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and stifled it, and it bore no fruit. But some fell upon the good soil, and it bore fruit, and shot up and increased, and yielded thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. And he said: He who has ears, let him hear. When they were alone, his followers along with the twelve asked him about the parables. He said to them: To you are given the secrets of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are outside all comes through parables, so that they may have sight but not see, and hear but not understand, lest they be converted and forgiven. And he said to them: You did not read this parable? Then how shall you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones beside the way where the word is sown, and as soon as they hear it Satan comes and snatches the word that has been sown among them. And there are some who are as if sown on stony ground, who when they hear the word accept it with joy; and they have no roots in themselves but are men of the moment, and when there comes affliction and persecution, because of the word, they do not stand fast. And others are those who were sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, and concern of the world and the beguilement of riches and desires for other things come upon them and stifle the word, and it bears no fruit. And the others are those who were sown upon the good soil, who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirtyfold and

sixtyfold and a hundredfold. Then he said to them: Surely the lamp is not brought in so as to be set under a basket or under the bed rather than to be set on a stand; for there is nothing hidden except to be shown, nor anything concealed except to be brought to light. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And he said to them: Consider what you hear. Your measure will be made by the measure by which you measure, and more shall be added for you. When a man has, he shall be given; when one has not, even what he has shall be taken away from him. And he said: The Kingdom of God is as when a man sows his seed in the ground, and sleeps and wakes night and day, and the seed grows and increases without his knowing it; for of itself the earth bears fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain gives its yield, he puts forth the sickle, for the time of harvesting is come. And he said: To what shall we liken the Kingdom of God, and in what parable shall we place it? It is like the seed of mustard, which when it is sown in the ground is smaller than all the seeds on earth, but when it has been sown, it shoots up and becomes greater than all the other greens, and puts forth great branches, so that the birds of the air may nest in its shadow. With many such parables he spoke the word to them, according to what they could comprehend; but he did not talk with them except in parables; but privately with his own disciples he expounded all.

Mark 4.11–30, translated by Richmond Lattimore

On Parables *and* Before the Law

Franz Kafka

Kafka's parables are to those of Jesus as surrealist metaphor is to ordinary metaphor. That is, instead of hiding but pointing clearly to a second level of meaning, they trouble thought and force the reader to generate meanings that cannot be assigned comfortably to the original text. Here are two of Kafka's parables. The first is a discussion of parable that blurs the distinction between reality and fiction, between the parable and the real. Try to interpret it—that's part of the game. But be flexible and listen gladly to other interpretations. The second, which is called "Before the Law," is also something of a puzzle, though its meaning may be clearer than that of the first. Do not wait before the gate. Offer your interpretation before it is too late.

On Parables

Many complain that the words of the wise are always merely parables 1
and of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have. When the sage says: "Go over," he does not mean that we should cross to some actual place, which we could do anyhow if the labor were worth it; he means some fabulous yonder, something unknown to us, something that he cannot designate more precisely either, and therefore cannot help us here in the very least. All

these parables really set out to say merely that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already. But the cares we have to struggle with every day: that is a different matter.

Concerning this a man once said: Why such reluctance? If you only followed the parables you yourselves would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares. 2

Another said: I bet that is also a parable. 3

The first said: You have won. 4

The second said: But unfortunately only in parable. 5

The first said: No, in reality: in parable you have lost. 6

Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

Before the Law

Before the law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country and prays for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot grant admittance at the moment. The man thinks it over and then asks if he will be allowed in later. "It is possible," says the doorkeeper, "but not at the moment." Since the gate stands open, as usual, and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man stoops to peer through the gateway into the interior. Observing that, the doorkeeper laughs and says: "If you are so drawn to it, just try to go in despite my veto. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the least of the doorkeepers. From hall to hall there is one doorkeeper after another, each more powerful than the last. The third doorkeeper is already so terrible that even I cannot bear to look at him." These are difficulties the man from the country has not expected; the Law, he thinks, should surely be accessible at all times and to everyone, but as he now takes a closer look at the doorkeeper in his fur coat, with his big sharp nose and long, thin, black Tartar beard, he decides that it is better to wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at one side of the door. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be admitted, and wearies the doorkeeper by his importunity. The doorkeeper frequently has little interviews with him, asking him questions about his home and many other things, but the questions are put indifferently, as great lords put them, and always finish with the statement that he cannot be let in yet. The man, who has furnished himself with many things for his journey, sacrifices all he has, however valuable, to bribe the doorkeeper. The doorkeeper accepts everything, but always with the remark: "I am only taking it to keep you from thinking you have omitted anything." During these many years the man fixes his attention almost continuously on the doorkeeper. He forgets the other doorkeepers, and this first one seems to him the sole obstacle preventing access to the Law. He curses his bad luck, in his early years boldly and loudly; later, as he grows old, he only grumbles to himself. He becomes childish, and since in his yearlong contemplation of the doorkeeper he has come to know even the fleas in his fur collar, he begs the fleas as well to help him and to change the doorkeeper's mind. At length his eyesight begins to fail, and he does not know whether the world is really

darker or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. Yet in his darkness he is now aware of a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the gateway of the Law. Now he has not very long to live. Before he dies, all his experiences in these long years gather themselves in his head to one point, a question he has not yet asked the doorkeeper. He waves him nearer, since he can no longer raise his stiffening body. The doorkeeper has to bend low toward him, for the difference in height between them has altered much to the man's disadvantage. "What do you want to know now?" asks the doorkeeper; "you are insatiable." "Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, "so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?" The doorkeeper recognizes that the man has reached his end, and, to let his failing senses catch the words, roars in his ear: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it."

Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

Borges and I *and* Ragnarök

Jorge Luis Borges

Jorge Luis Borges, who died not so long ago, liked the parable form and admired Kafka's use of it. Here are two of Borges's short pieces that might be called parables and certainly ask to be interpreted as we interpret parables. The first, called "Borges and I," is about the relationship between the private and public self and the difference between the real and the artificial. In discussing it, try to decide which is the "real" Borges. The second is called "Ragnarök," the Norse name for the end of the reign of the old gods. That should give you a start on reading it. Notice that Borges uses the notion of dream-work as a way of accounting for the fantastic features of this allegory.

Borges and I

It's Borges, the other one, that things happen to. I walk through Buenos 1
Aires and I pause—mechanically now, perhaps—to gaze at the arch of an entryway and its inner door; news of Borges reaches me by mail, or I see his name on a list of academics or in some biographical dictionary. My taste runs to hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typefaces, etymologies, the taste of coffee, and the prose of Robert Louis Stevenson; Borges shares those preferences, but in a vain sort of way that turns them into the accoutrements of an actor. It would be an exaggeration to say that our relationship is hostile—I live, I allow myself to live, so that Borges can spin out his literature, and that literature is my justification. I willingly admit that he has written a number of sound pages, but those pages will not save *me*, perhaps because the good in them no longer belongs to any individual, not even to that other man, but rather to language itself, or to tradition. Beyond that, I am doomed—utterly

and inevitably—to oblivion, and fleeting moments will be all of me that survives in that other man. Little by little, I have been turning everything over to him, though I know the perverse way he has of distorting and magnifying everything. Spinoza believed that all things wish to go on being what they are—stone wishes eternally to be stone, and tiger, to be tiger. I shall endure in Borges, not in myself (if, indeed, I am anybody at all), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others', or in the tedious strumming of a guitar. Years ago I tried to free myself from him, and I moved on from the mythologies of the slums and outskirts of the city to games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now, and I shall have to think up other things. So my life is a point-counterpoint, a kind of fugue, and a falling away—and everything winds up being lost to me, and everything falls into oblivion, or into the hands of the other man.

I am not sure which of us it is that's writing this page. 2

Ragnarök

The images in dreams, wrote Coleridge, figure forth the impressions that 1
our intellect would call causes; we do not feel horror because we are haunted by a sphinx, we dream a sphinx in order to explain the horror that we feel. If that is true, how might a mere chronicling of its forms transmit the stupor, the exultation, the alarms, the dread, and the joy that wove together that night's dream? I shall attempt that chronicle, nonetheless; perhaps the fact that the dream consisted of but a single scene may erase or soften the essential difficulty.

The place was the College of Philosophy and Letters; the hour, nightfall. 2
Everything (as is often the case in dreams) was slightly different; a slight magnification altered things. We chose authorities; I would speak with Pedro Henríquez Ureña, who in waking life had died many years before. Suddenly, we were dumbfounded by a great noise of demonstrators or street musicians. From the Underworld, we heard the cries of humans and animals. A voice cried: *Here they come!* and then: *The gods! the gods!* Four or five individuals emerged from out of the mob and occupied the dais of the auditorium. Everyone applauded, weeping; it was the gods, returning after a banishment of many centuries. Looming larger than life as they stood upon the dais, their heads thrown back and their chests thrust forward, they haughtily received our homage. One of them was holding a branch (which belonged, no doubt, to the simple botany of dreams); another, with a sweeping gesture, held out a hand that was a claw; one of Janus' faces looked mistrustfully at Thoth's curved beak. Perhaps excited by our applause, one of them, I no longer remember which, burst out in a triumphant, incredibly bitter clucking that was half gargle and half whistle. From that point on, things changed.

It all began with the suspicion (perhaps exaggerated) that the gods were 3
unable to talk. Centuries of a feral life of flight had atrophied that part of them that was human; the moon of Islam and the cross of Rome had been implacable with these fugitives. Beetling brows, yellowed teeth, the sparse beard of a mulatto or a Chinaman, and beastlike dewlaps were testaments to the degeneration of the Olympian line. The clothes they wore were not those of a

decorous and honest poverty, but rather of the criminal luxury of the Underworld's gambling dens and houses of ill repute. A carnation bled from a buttonhole; under a tight suitcoat one could discern the outline of a knife. Suddenly, we felt that they were playing their last trump, that they were cunning, ignorant, and cruel, like agèd predators, and that if we allowed ourselves to be swayed by fear or pity, they would wind up destroying us.

We drew our heavy revolvers (suddenly in the dream there were revolvers) and exultantly killed the gods. 4

Two Parables of Calvino

Italo Calvino

The Italian author Italo Calvino, like many postmodern writers, worked frequently in or near the parable. As a veteran reader of parables, you should be ready to read these and discuss the meanings concealed in them. As with many parables, the keys to the meaning of these are most likely to be found near the end of the little stories. Both parables are taken from Calvino's Invisible Cities, *a collection of related parables.*

Cities and Memory: Isidora

When a man rides a long time through wild regions he feels the desire for a city. Finally he comes to Isidora, a city where the buildings have spiral staircases encrusted with spiral seashells, where perfect telescopes and violins are made, where the foreigner hesitating between two women always encounters a third, where cockfights degenerate into bloody brawls among the bettors. He was thinking of all these things when he desired a city. Isidora, therefore, is the city of his dreams: with one difference. The dreamed-of city contained him as a young man; he arrives at Isidora in his old age. In the square there is the wall where the old men sit and watch the young go by; he is seated in a row with them. Desires are already memories.

Continuous Cities: Cecilia

You reproach me because each of my stories takes you right into the heart of a city without telling you of the space that stretches between one city and the other, whether it is covered by seas, or fields of rye, larch forests, swamps. I will answer you with a story. 1

In the streets of Cecilia, an illustrious city, I met once a goatherd, driving a tinkling flock along the walls. 2

"Man blessed by heaven," he asked me, stopping, "can you tell me the name of the city in which we are?" 3

"May the gods accompany you!" I cried. "How can you fail to recognize the illustrious city of Cecilia?" 4

"Bear with me," that man answered. "I am a wandering herdsman. Sometimes my goats and I have to pass through cities; but we are unable to distinguish them. Ask me the names of the grazing lands: I know them all, the Meadow between the Cliffs, the Green Slope, the Shadowed Grass. Cities have no name for me: they are places without leaves, separating one pasture from another, and where the goats are frightened at street corners and scatter. The dog and I run to keep the flock together." 5

"I am the opposite of you," I said. "I recognize only cities and cannot distinguish what is outside them. In uninhabited places each stone and each clump of grass mingles, in my eyes, with every other stone and clump." 6

Many years have gone by since then; I have known many more cities and I have crossed continents. One day I was walking among rows of identical houses; I was lost. I asked a passerby: "May the immortals protect you, can you tell me where we are?" 7

"In Cecilia, worse luck!" he answered. "We have been wandering through its streets, my goats and I, for an age, and we cannot find our way out. . . ." 8

I recognized him, despite his long white beard; it was the same herdsman of long before. He was followed by a few, mangy goats, which did not even stink, they were so reduced to skin-and-bones. They cropped wastepaper in the rubbish bins. 9

"That cannot be!" I shouted. "I, too, entered a city, I cannot remember when, and since then I have gone on, deeper and deeper into its streets. But how have I managed to arrive where you say, when I was in another city, far far away from Cecilia, and I have not yet left it?" 10

"The places have mingled," the goatherd said. "Cecilia is everywhere. Here, once upon a time, there must have been the Meadow of the Low Sage. My goats recognize the grass on the traffic island." 11

Night-Sea Journey

John Barth

In her essay on biological metaphors, Emily Martin refers to this story in a footnote. The first question, then, is why she did this. The piece reads like an essay, a meditation on a journey, perhaps a philosophical text on "the meaning of life." Some readers have taken it to be such. But Martin's interest in it suggests that it may have more to do with biology than with philosophy. We invite you to read it and to consider all the possible areas of thought in which it can be held to make sense: philosophy, biology, art. In your discussion you might consider the last words, asking what all this has to do with "love."

"One way or another, no matter which theory of our journey is correct, it's myself I address; to whom I rehearse as to a stranger our history and condition, and will disclose my secret hope though I sink for it. 1