



## Barleycorn: Seeds That Fell along the Path, Book 1

**Harold Auckridge**

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*Barleycorn is a compelling tale with a fresh perspective on God and religion.*

Questions around the nature of God, humanity, and faith sprout and grow in Harold Auckridge's surreal novel *Barleycorn*.

Barleycorn and Mustard Seed are literally seeds, buried in the earth, telling each other stories as they wait to sprout. Barleycorn tells of Luminous, an omnipotent being who interacts with a human couple, Eliakim and Anne. In a world that has neither a specific time nor setting, these three characters change form, switch roles, and simultaneously make holy peace and holy war with each other.

*Barleycorn* explores the relationship between God and humans, a theme that is executed largely through symbolism. This is clearest in the characters of Barleycorn and Mustard Seed, variations of which play significant parts in the Christian New Testament: Jesus fed three thousand followers with loaves of barley bread and later used the mustard seed in a parable to illustrate how even a little faith can lead to great things. Even the impetus of the story—two seeds waiting to sprout—comes from another parable explaining how faith takes root.

Auckridge doesn't just use symbols to retell a familiar tale; he often twists tropes, breaking down their preconceived meanings. At times, Luminous behaves in a very human way. He feels shame and worries about his survival. Eliakim and Anne seem more benevolent and omnipotent at times than their god. Luminous and his humans also exist alongside supernatural creatures, including giants, cyclopes, dragons, titans, and even robots, giving the novel a surreal tone. Such fantasy elements are a creative addition to the novel's analysis of human relationships with God.

Humor marks the text, too. In several scenes with the humans and Luminous, Barleycorn and Mustard Seed interject funny, often seed-related comments over the story.

The book's greatest strength is its style. Most of the story is told through character dialogue. Actions are conveyed at a high level: characters live, fight, die, come apart, or re-form in the space of a mere sentence. While there could be more description, the prose is clear and well constructed.

The pacing is also swift. Throughout the novel, situations arise among Luminous, Anne, and Eliakim, resolve, and then flow right into another situation. This makes for an engaging read, though the sheer quantity of different adventures becomes overwhelming. There is little room to digest what's happening. Nonetheless, those familiar with the Bible and related works will be able to see what Auckridge is doing with Christian symbols and tropes.

*Barleycorn* is a compelling tale with a fresh perspective on God and religion. It breaks down humanity's relationship with the divine so that, like seeds, it can sprout into greater and better things.

KATERIE PRIOR (January 16, 2018)

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