

but in the part-whole interrelations of poetic texts, through diverse aspects of language (p. 49). Although ‘free-rhythm’ is a term not from her own innovation, previous free-rhythm models contain remaining assumptions of metrical approaches, thus calling for a new model that differentiates meter and rhythm with consistency—Grosser’s research answers this call.

The book contains three parts. In the first part (chapters 1–3), Grosser captures the contributions and limitations of previous approaches to poetic structures in biblical poetry, and well defends the advantages of her approach. Due to the complex nature of cognitive processing, employing the cognitive constraint approach in reading Hebrew poetry is a promising yet difficult area with many unresolved questions. Grosser, however, successfully tackles the discipline by focusing on part-whole processing—an angle in the cognitive process that is relatively traceable and portrayable. In the second part (chapters 4–6), Grosser examines the integral role of Gestalt principles of perception in perceiving biblical poetic lines; Gestalt principles being the law of simplicity, proximity, similarity, symmetry, good continuation, closure, and requiredness. With precise articulation and organic presentation through sampling texts, Grosser lays out the ways the Gestalt principles shape the perception of the Hebrew poetic structure in multifaceted linguistic levels—a very complex figural portrait that Grosser handles with ease. She also warns that not every occurrence of Gestalt principles in Hebrew poetry is relevant to the poetic structure but needs discernment (p. 100). In the third part (chapters 7–9), Grosser addresses remaining issues such as unintegrated lines and the distinction between biblical poetry and prose, and her conclusion.

It is not easy to find limitations in this excellent work, but I will name one. It appears to me that Grosser’s sampling tend to select poems with a structure conventionally held to be *irregular* or, in some sense, flexible (e.g. Judges 5; 2 Sam 1:19–27; Psalms 23, 100). I will challenge this model with the following two questions. For the poems that contain lines that are often held as strictly regular (or *tight*) (e.g. Eccl 3:2–8), does Grosser’s free-rhythm work for them? If yes, to what extent does her model exceed the conventional approach to lineation in those poems? My opinion is that a fuller spectrum of types of biblical poetry as case texts will validate the advantages of her approach to a greater extent. Aside from this potential limitation awaiting to be addressed, it is my appraisal that Grosser’s *Unparalleled Poetry* has done an unparalleled service to the cognition of lineation in biblical poetry.

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## *Tolkien’s Faith: A Spiritual Biography*

By Holly Ordway

Elk Grove Village, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2023. 544pp.

Hardback, \$27.96. ISBN-13 978-1-68578-991-6.

While J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and other creations enthrall readers through immersive adventures and captivating characters, a deeper understanding of the author’s faith unlocks a new dimension of appreciation. Tolkien declared his works “fundamentally religious and Catholic,” but their subtle nuances often escape surface-level readings. Delving into his faith journey unveils crucial threads woven into the very fabric of his narratives.

In the expansive corpus of literature dedicated to J.R.R. Tolkien, his faith has often been overshadowed by the towering legacies of Middle-earth. Holly Ordway's *Tolkien's Faith: A Spiritual Biography* is a seminal work that meticulously unravels the interplay between Tolkien's devout Catholicism and his literary creations. Ordway, the Cardinal Francis George Professor of Faith and Culture at the Word on Fire Institute, brings to the fore a long-neglected dimension of Tolkien's life—his spiritual journey.

Ordway's biography distinguishes itself through its rigorous exploration of Tolkien's spiritual development, from his environment to the profound Catholic faith he maintained throughout his life. Ordway delves into the complexities of Tolkien's life, including the pivotal moments that shaped his religious beliefs and, by extension, his literary work. The biography is not merely a chronological recounting of events but a deep, thematic exploration of the influence of faith on Tolkien's creativity. Ordway's scholarship shines in her ability to weave together Tolkien's letters, unpublished works, and the socioreligious context of his time, offering readers a holistic view of the man behind Middle-earth. Ordway's balanced approach further enriches the narrative. She neither critiques nor endorses Tolkien's religious beliefs but presents them with an academic rigor that allows readers to form their interpretations. This objectivity is crucial for the work's target academic audience, providing a foundation for further scholarship in Tolkien studies and the study of literature and religion.

In the context of Tolkien scholarship, *Tolkien's Faith* offers a distinctive examination of Tolkien's Catholicism, contrasting with Stratford Caldecott's 2012 thematic analysis in *The Power of the Ring* and Matthew Dickerson's moral focus in his 2003 *Following Gandalf*. Ordway's work is pioneering in its rich, contextual exploration of Tolkien's spiritual environment. She draws upon lesser-known aspects of his life, such as his mother's conversion to Catholicism and its subsequent impact on him, connecting these to the moral fabric of his characters in a manner not extensively covered by her predecessors. While Ordway's approach is meticulous, the scholarly conversation could benefit from a deeper dive into how Tolkien's faith influenced specific narrative decisions in his works, albeit, Ordway does give some examples of how this did, in fact, occur. Academically, the book sits at the intersection of religious studies and literary critique, broadening the scope for future research. A critical view suggests that while Ordway thoroughly delineates the impact of faith on Tolkien's creativity, there remains room for exploration into the nuanced ways his faith clashed with the evolving religious landscape of his time.

Notwithstanding, Ordway does venture beyond surface-level observations, pointing out specific narrative choices that are imbued with Catholic symbolism. For instance, the significance of "eucatastrophe" in *The Lord of the Rings*—the sudden, joyous turn—which Tolkien relates to the Resurrection, a central event in the Christian faith. This concept is poignantly embodied in the redemption arcs of key characters and the climactic moments of hope in the darkest times, reflective of the influence of Tolkien's beliefs on his storytelling. Ordway also deciphers the sacramental aspects of Middle-earth, revealing how the ordinary is suffused with a deeper, spiritual significance. She posits that the very act of sub-creation within Tolkien's works is a reflection of his theological understanding of humanity's role in the world. The meticulous construction of languages, races, and history within Tolkien's legendarium can be seen as an act of honoring the Creator by creating oneself, a theme central to his own philosophical and religious convictions.

Ordway expounds on the subtle interplay between the characters' virtues and Tolkien's Catholic worldview. The hobbits, with their simple yet profound virtues of faithfulness and humility and their resistance to power and corruption, mirror the Catholic virtues of modesty and fortitude. She presents a thorough analysis of how the temperance of characters like Frodo and Samwise is not just a literary tool but a manifestation of Tolkien's understanding of Catholic teachings on moral theology. Through her exploration, Ordway challenges readers to consider how the threads of faith are seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of Tolkien's character development and overarching narrative structure.

One of the most visually striking aspects of Ordway's biography is the curated selection of photographs accompanying the text. These images serve not merely as embellishments but as integral components of the narrative, offering a visual context that enriches the reader's understanding of Tolkien's life and times. The photographs range from personal moments to broader historical contexts, bridging the gap between the reader and the historical figure of Tolkien. This visual dimension adds a layer of engagement, allowing readers to connect more deeply with the subject matter.

Ordway's erudition in biblical history and theology is evident throughout the biography. She adeptly situates Tolkien's faith within the broader narrative of Catholicism in England, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of the religious climate that influenced him. This contextualization is crucial, permitting a deeper appreciation of the subtleties of Tolkien's faith and how it diverged from and conformed to the religious norms of his time. Here, Ordway's exploration of biblical motifs in Tolkien's work is both insightful and illuminating. By drawing parallels between Tolkien's narratives and biblical themes, Ordway offers a compelling argument for the intrinsic connection between Tolkien's faith and his fiction. This analysis is particularly valuable for scholars interested in the intersection of literature and theology, offering new avenues for research and discussion.

*Tolkien's Faith: A Spiritual Biography* is an astonishingly comprehensive, meticulously researched work that fills a significant gap in Tolkien scholarship. Through its detailed exploration of Tolkien's spiritual journey, including evocative photographs, and the insightful analysis of biblical themes in his work, Ordway provides readers with a deeper understanding of the man behind some of the most beloved stories in literature. This biography is not only an indispensable resource for Tolkien enthusiasts but also a significant contribution to the fields of religious studies and literary analysis. Ordway's work invites readers to reconsider Tolkien not just as a literary figure but as a complex individual whose profound faith shaped every aspect of his creative output. In doing so, *Tolkien's Faith* enriches our appreciation of Tolkien's legacy and offers fresh perspectives on the intricate relationship between faith and literature.

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## *The Autism of Gxd: An Atheological Love Story.*

By Ruth Dunster

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022. 440pp. Paperback, £47.

*The Autism of Gxd* by Ruth Dunster is a book of profundity, playfulness, and poetics. It is deeply personal and emotive, whilst also a feat of theological scholarship and literary analysis. At its heart, the book challenges perception and boundaries: these include the limitations imposed on understandings of autism as a result of diagnostic framing; theological restrictions imposed on the language and understanding of God (Gxd—the naming of God/'Gxd' is part of this challenge and play at the boundary); and limitations imposed on the reading of poetry as a