

Coming Back

by [David Solway](#) (April 2024)



The Raising of Lazarus –by Jan Lievens, 1631

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Then Lazarus was lugged into the grave
and all his bones, so lively once, that kept

time at many a revel, and roved
many a midnight in the marriage grove,
knew the paralysis of the inept,
shame-shackled in the dance and self-unloved.

The pilgrimage of long-forgotten birth
descended from Bethany to the cave,
concluding in flint that cupped no spark,
and all his flesh had settled with the earth,
steeped in dark by the chronicled wave.
The dogs of Sheol had begun to bark.

His memories had seeped into the roots
of the greedy, vicarious trees
that drank them up and re-remembered them,
his loves, his consummations, his disputes;
and nicking the fever of these reveries
the blood had risen in the flower stem.

Then Jesus stood by the unportalled vault
that was the dead man's mortal monument
and heard the dry incredulous whisper
of those behind him, skeptical as salt,
doubting the miracle of that ascent,
catch breathless as the earth began to stir

and Lazarus, clocking in every bone,
the spittle webbed between his rigid jaws,
crept from the open crypt to stand and gape,
Lazarus, come forth! echoing from the stone
in which his senses slept. But all the laws
of time begrudged his recollected shape,

and blinking sunlight from unaccustomed eyes,
the breath seizing in his throat from shock,
he could not form the words to make him live.
And then he knew beneath the vultures' cries

that time was more retentive than the rock
from which he rose his own derivative.

Now Lazarus can do little but resemble
what he had been, and little but repeat
what he had said, being half-embodied whim.
The slightest wind makes his likeness tremble.
The earth quakes steadily underneath his feet.
The voice of gentle Jesus deafens him.

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David Solway's latest book is [*Crossing the Jordan: On Judaism, Islam, and the West*](#) (NER Press). His previous book is [*Notes from a Derelict Culture*](#), Black House Publishing, 2019, London. A CD of his original songs, [*Partial to Cain*](#), appeared in 2019.

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