

Lazarus

Jason Akley

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“Never say you know the last word about any human heart.”

—Henry James

Author Jason Akley pushes against teetering fences that surround the simplified structure of the twenty-first-century novel, invoking the high drama of Sophocles, the controlled melodrama of Dickens, the intellectualism of Henry James, and a Proustian application of stream of consciousness.

Spanning 313 years, *Lazarus* reveals the non-linear chronicles of the Roman family, a dynasty similar to the Compsons from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Like Faulkner, Akley has borrowed heavily from Shakespeare and the Greek playwrights, and *Lazarus* is a Greek tragedy transplanted into a deep southern American gothic setting. Akley also applies the perspectives of multiple narrators like Faulkner frequently did. He uses mock newspaper clippings, government documents, letters, journal entries, emails, a screenplay adaptation, and repetition from a legion of characters to enhance his narrative.

Pivotal to the story is the lazy, philosophical, sensitive, and suicidal writer, Jude Roman, cousin to the title character. Jude might be compared to a piece of cracked glass in a kaleidoscope which the smaller pieces of multi-colored glass revolve around and temporarily connect with. He is the only character in the novel with the talent, honesty, and distance to tell the unbiased story of Lazarus and the other Romans. In his journal, Jude writes:

And it was Henry Miller that did it...I poured over his words. It was like a cultured symphony in the putrescence of a ghetto...My mind embraced his joy as he stripped life down to its naked sores...so there I stood...dreaming of ambitious debacles...To tell the story of the world in the words of my of my own life...to mix fact with fiction, to tell the truth of the imagination, to express the deepest themes of existence...

Akley is the author of two children's books and a collection of novellas, *Salted with Salt* and *The Altar of Silence*. It is unfortunate that a novel with such power and brilliance is marred with typos, grammatical errors, punctuation, improper use of tenses, and sentence fragments. Overlooking these obvious mistakes, *Lazarus* is an ambitious composition that rapidly plays emotional scales along the Stradivarius strings of humanity.

Lazarus is an epic novel in scope and style. Rich prose is combined with tropes and archetypes borrowed from the Greeks, like murder, incest, and suicide. Akley's writing is a seven course meal that is a welcome change to the formulaic fast food fiction that dominates the bestseller lists.

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