



It's one of our oldest stories: a return from the grave. As long as humanity is flesh-and-bone (until we upload to that great silicon cloud in the sky, that is), we're going to challenge the old ashes-to-ashes adage and wonder whether there isn't a chance of coming back for one more wondrous go.

What if the afterlife was just...more life? Priests aren't the only ones who grapple with the question, and Easter isn't the only time to dwell on it.

Throughout the ages, artists have imagined reversing the irreversible: a character, a beloved, a villain back from the dead. In literature, it's one of the oldest devices around. A hero comes back, against the greatest odds of all, to save the day. But for every kingly lion or super wizard who breezily returns to life more powerful than before, our authors offer up a resurrection gone wrong: a decomposing corpse an embittered bride. And then sometimes life just carries on as it always has: the humdrum revival.

There's no one vision of what it means to defy the Grim Reaper (Mot, Thanatos, King Yan, Mahweth, Azrail, Giltinè—an angel of many names). But what everyone seems to agree on is this: you can't cross earthly boundaries without being irrevocably changed. Whether that's a blessing or a curse depends on who's doing the returning, and who's doing the telling.

Here are eleven books that tackle that great question: could we come back?

(And for the record, yes, we understand this is a weird topic for a book list. That's why we did it! No blasphemy intended. Hints of blaspheme, sure...)

1. Melquiades in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel García Márquez

Melquiades the gypsy floats in and out of this epic novel like the ghost he eventually becomes—introducing new technology (magnets! ice!) and narrating the Buendía family's story. Thanks to Garcia Marquez' genius, it doesn't sound that strange at all when Melquiades reports (in the flesh) that he died in the sands of Singapore, not from a giant squid attack as some had claimed. It's all part of the magic added to that old literary stalwart, realism.

2. Herbert White in *The Monkey's Paw*, by W.W. Jacobs

Published in England in 1902, this short story by W. W. Jacobs combines elements of the Arabian Nights with Kipling's tales of the British Raj. The story is also an allegory for the old advice: "be careful what you wish for." The White family is struggling to get by when they are visited by their friend Sergeant-Major Morris, who recently returned from serving with the British Army in India. Morris has a magical object in his possession: a wish-granting, mummified monkey's paw that has caused him nothing but trouble. Mr. White invokes the paw despite Morris' warnings, and when he wishes for 200 pounds to pay off his house, the money comes by way of a reparation payment from his son's untimely death at the factory. Mrs. White then wishes her son back to life, but the corpse who shows up at the door is so disgusting and half-rotted that they have to use their last wish to...well, you'll find out.

3. Emma Wintertowne in *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, by Susanna Clarke

Susanna Clarke's epic novel imagines an alternative history of England where magic is just another long-forgotten art like hieroglyphics. Mr. Norrell is on a quest to revive the practice of magic, but it quickly intensifies from fun spells like moving statues or conjuring ships out of fog. When Norrell agrees to resurrect the recently deceased Emma Wintertowne, she comes back without her finger and is slowly driven insane.

4. Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis

Along with his friend J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis was a proud and well-known Christian, so it's not that surprising that the king of Narnia is often read as an allegory for Jesus Christ. Aslan is a noble leader who sacrifices himself to save Edmund, an innocent. The morning after the White Witch kills Aslan, his giant lion body rises from the dead and he vanquishes his enemy.

5. Gandolf in *The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkien

Tolkien also included a major resurrection in his famous series. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the wizard Gandalf dies on Zirak Zigel, only to come back to life as the even more powerful Gandalf the White. Thanks to Tolkien and Lewis, this trope—an important-and-wise character dies, then comes back to life—is now firmly-entrenched in the fantasy writer's bag of tricks. Perhaps too much so.

6. John Harmon in *Our Mutual Friend*, by Charles Dickens

Dickens' last novel employs the old plot device of "resurrecting" a character who never actually died. In this case, a young man named John Harmon pretends to have drowned in the Thames so that he can gather more intel on his sudden inheritance and the man who accepts the money in his place—one adorably named, Mr. Boffins.

7. Juliet in *Romeo & Juliet*, by William Shakespeare

In *Romeo & Juliet*, Shakespeare also makes use of the false death, but to much more devastating effect. After Juliet imbibes a liquid which makes her appear dead, she's laid in the Capulet family crypt. Romeo doesn't get the message that she's only pretending, so he drinks a vial of poison to be with her. When Juliet wakes up to find Romeo dying, she stabs herself with his knife. Life before cell phones could be brutal.

8. Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, by J.K. Rowling

During the ultimate showdown between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort, Harry is injured and sent to limbo, which looks like a ghostly version of King's Cross Station. Rowling has said that she wanted Harry to be forced to choose between life and death. Harry chooses life because he's a hero and because really, who wants to be stuck in a train station for eternity?

9. Ligeia/Rowena in *Ligeia*, by Edgar Allan Poe

Poe published this haunting story in 1838. The story's narrator is crushed when his beloved first wife, Ligeia, dies. He's only partially recovered, in part thanks to using opium, when he marries his second wife, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine. One night Rowena is struck down by illness. When her corpse rises from her deathbed and walks into the middle of the room, the narrator realizes she has come back to life as his first wife Ligeia. That's where the story ends, though we might assume the postscript is that the narrator, too, dies, from overdosing on opium at his wife's bedside.

10. Jon Snow in *A Dance with Dragons* / (presumably) *The Winds of Winter*, by George R.R. Martin

As it stands, HBO's "Game of Thrones" series has outpaced George R.R. Martin's published novels. Martin killed off his hero, Jon Snow, in 2011, but he hasn't yet published the next book in the series. However, Martin has confirmed that the general conclusions of his books will match the television show, meaning we can safely assume that the next installment of *A Song of Ice and Fire* will include Jon Snow coming back to life and kicking some traitorous Night's Watch hide.

11. Aunt Bernie in *Sea Oak*, by George Saunders

Published in Saunders' short story collection *Pastoralia*, this funny, weird, gory story is about consumerism and poverty in America—and more literally about a male stripper whose once-optimistic aunt comes back from the dead. Aunt Bernie's reanimated corpse is bitter yet determined to help her nephew prostitute himself into financial security and out of their crumbling apartment.