

Main ideas of lady lazarus poem

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“ Lady Lazarus”, written by Sylvia Plath in 1962, was a poem gathered posthumously through her collection Ariel published in 1965. The poem is about death or, more specifically, suicide. It is written to an unnamed “ you” from the perspective of a suicidal woman who shares a significant amount of similarities with the poet. Sylvia Plath was born in 1932 in Boston, Massachusetts to Aurelia Schober and Otto Plath, the latter of whom died when Sylvia was eight. Despite deep depression and a consequential suicide attempt in 1953, Plath managed to graduate summa cum laude from Smith College in 1955. Soon after, Plath married English poet Ted Hughes whose later infidelity and ensuing divorce sent Plath into a crippling depression. All of these experiences palpably influenced Plath’s poetry. In Lady Lazarus, Sylvia Plath explores the resurrection of living through a suicide attempt through the tale of Lazarus, which reveals that no one can control anything in their life — not even death.

The poem begins on an obscure note reading, as the first stanza, “ I have done it again. / One year in every ten / I manage it — ” (l. 1-3). The mysterious “ it” she is referring to is not truly uncovered to the reader until later in the poem but as it continues it becomes obvious that the speaker is discussing her attempted suicide. With that knowledge, the reader can come to understand that the speaker has encountered death a lot in her life. She has come to the brink of death and faced it more than once. Even still, she is here to tell the story. She has looked in the eyes of death and come back again. Because of this, the speaker feels resurrected much similar to Lazarus who was brought back to life by Jesus in the book of John. A few stanzas after this, she recalls the times when death was at her doorstep. She writes, “ the

first time it happened I was ten. / It was an accident. / The second time I meant / To last it out and not come back at all. / I rocked shut / As a seashell. / They had to call and call / And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls” (l. 35-42). “ The second time” is when she attempted to commit suicide and was saved. Brought back to life by others, it is here again that she feels resurrected. However, this is not all positive for Lady Lazarus. She may think she can control at least the most primitive parts of her life, like living or dying, but in reality she is helpless. As a bystander of her own life, she is powerless in her own body.

Midway through the poem, the speaker starts telling less about stories and more about how they make her feel. Alluding back to the circus image, the speaker talks about dying as a talent or an art. She says, “ dying is an art, / like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well. / I do it so it feels like hell. / I do it so it feels real. / I guess you could say I’ve a call” (l. 43-48). In her mind, Lady Lazarus is connoisseur of death. As she says, she thinks of it as her calling. She escapes death, is saved from it, only to yearn to be close to it again. To feel control, to feel a sense of authority in her own life, she makes her dying feel real. She makes it feel so purposeful that no one could deny that she is the deciding factor in her life despite the fact that she is not.

Arguably the most poignant lines in the poem are the last three. “ Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / and I eat men like air” (l. 82-84). If the entire poem had to be summed up in a few lines, this would be it. Lady Lazarus rises again with the same resoluteness and determination. In keeping with the rest of the poem, she is determined to be in control — to fall when she

wants to fall and rise when she wants to rise — even if it is useless. She will fight until the last breath to have that authority over her life and that theme is most apparent here. It's a scary thought that no one has complete control over their life. So, instead of accepting it even though she knows it to be true, she fights against it. She does not let futility stop her rage, her passion, and her determination to prove that at the end of the day, she is in control, even if she has to prove it in the most severe way. In Lady Lazarus, Sylvia Plath delves into the notion that through resurrection and rebirth comes a knowledge that no one is truly in control (and that it might be okay).