

**Hunt for Re-birth in Sylvia Plath's *Lady Lazarus*****Dr. A. Sophiamary**Assistant Professor of English  
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**Abstract**

Sylvia Plath was a twentieth century American poet and novelist whose vivid imagery, searing tone, and intimate topics cemented her place among the pantheon of great poets. Sylvia Plath's early poems exhibit what became her typical imagery, using personal and nature-based depictions featuring, for example, the moon, blood, hospitals, fetuses, and skulls. Many of Plath's later poems deal with the domestic surreal in which Plath takes every day elements of life and twists the images, giving them an almost nightmarish quality. Plath suffered from depression for much of her adult life, and in 1963 she committed suicide. Controversy continues to surround the events of her life and death, as well as her writing and legacy.

*Lady Lazarus* is a poem about suicide. It is narrated by a woman, and mostly addressed to an unspecified person, a male, whether it is daddy or a doctor or even god, Plath's poems usually symbolises these destructive agents the feminine persona. The narrator begins by saying she has done it again. In many ways Plath's subject is the total purification of achieved death. It is also intimately concerned with the drift of Plath's life. She seems to believe she will reach perfection through escaping her body.

**Keywords:** pain, depression, stress, passion, suicide, escape, death

A few old, rotting fireplace logs blocked the hole mouth. I shoved them back a bit. Then I set the glass of water and the bottle of pills side by side on the flat surface of one of the logs and started to heave myself up.... Then, one after the other, I lugged the heavy, dust-covered logs across the hole mouth. The dark felt thick as velvet. I reached for the glass and bottle, and carefully, on my knees, with a bent head, crawled to the farthest wall. Cobwebs touched my face with the softness of moths. Wrapping my black coat round me like my own sweet shadow. I unscrewed the bottle of pills and started taking them swiftly, between gulps of water, one by one by one (Plath, *The Bell Jar*, 138).

*Lady Lazarus* is a confessional poem written by the American poet Sylvia Plath. Published in *Ariel* in 1965 the speaker explains her repeated suicide attempts and her resurrections by each time as a dramatic performance. The key themes of this poem are death and rebirth, suicide, gender and oppression, suffering, objectification and art. Every ten years, she manages to commit this unnamed act. She considers herself a walking miracle with bright skin, her right foot a paperweight, and her face as fine and featureless as Jew linen. She addresses an unspecified enemy, asking him to peel the napkin from her face, and inquiring whether he is terrified by the features he sees there. She assures him that her sour breath will vanish in a day. She is certain that her flesh will soon be restored to her face after having been sacrificed to the grave, and that she will then be a smiling, 30 year-old woman. She will ultimately be able to die nine times, like a cat, and has just completed her third death. She will die once each decade. After each death, a peanut-crunching crowd shoves in to see her body unwrapped. She addresses the crowd directly, showing them she remains skin and bone, unchanged from who she was before. She sneers that everyone is used to crowding in and watching her self-destruct.

*Lady Lazarus*, she claims that she has mastered the art of dying. She believes that dying is an art, like everything else. The first death occurred when she was ten, accidentally. The second death was intentional she did not mean to return from it. Instead, she was as shut as a seashell until she was called back by people who then picked the worms off her corpse. She does not specifically identify how either death occurred. Each time it feels real and easy for her. What is difficult is the dramatic comeback, the return to the same place and body, occurring as it does in broad daylight before a crowd's cry of 'A miracle!' She reinterprets herself as she is reborn

from the suicide. She marvels at her ability to stay alive. She believes people should pay to view her scars, hear her heart.

In the final stanzas, she addresses the listener that she is his crowning achievement, a pure gold baby. She does not underestimate his concern, but is bothered by how he picks through her ashes. She insists there is nothing there but soap, a wedding ring, and a gold filling. *Lady Lazarus* is a complicated, dark, and brutal poem. The poem suggests it would release her from the difficulties of life, and bring her transcendence wherein her mind could free itself from its corporeal cage. Its tone veers between menacing and scathing, and it has drawn attention for its use of Holocaust imagery, similar to *Daddy*. The title is an allusion to the Biblical character, Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. The standard interpretation of the poem suggests that it is about multiple suicide attempts.

The speaker's contradictory feelings is not bound by any metaphysical belief in the self's limitations. Instead of resisting the self's antagonists she derives a tremendous thrill from throwing her imagination into the act of self-obliteration. She can destroy her body, but her imaginative self remains a performer, always aware of the effect she has on others. The poem can also be understood through a feminist lens, as a demonstration of the female artist's struggle for autonomy in a patriarchal society. The female creation of a male-artist god is asserting independent creative powers. From this perspective, *Lady Lazarus* is not merely a confessional poem detailing depressive feelings, but is also a statement on how the powerful male figure usurps Plath's creative powers but is defeated by her rebirth.

A comment on the relationship between poet and audience in a society that, as Pamela Anna's claims has separated creativity and consumption. The crowd views *Lady Lazarus* as an object, and therefore does not recognize her as a human being. Plath reflects this through her multiple references to body parts separated from the whole. From this interpretation, *Lady Lazarus's* suicide then becomes an assertion of wholeness, an act of self-definition, and a last desperate act of contempt toward the peanut-crunching crowd. The only way she can keep herself intact is to destroy herself, and she does this rather than be turned into commodities.

From the psychoanalytical point of view, that the poem does not literally express reality alone: it is the relieving anger and frustration, and an alternative outlet of the neurotic energy in the form of poetic expression. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the anger as being directed against the general forces of inhumanity, violence and destruction only symbolized by the males in the poem. The poem is said to evolve from many kinds of losses and tragedies that Plath experienced and wanted to turn in to positive advantages.

By a process of association and surrealism, the protest moves from common males to Hitler, his experimenting doctor, the scavengers of gold on dead Jews, the dentists who had a turn before the corpses were disposed for leather, soap, nightshades and fertilizer. The individual is associatively linked to inhumanity and oppression. Sylvia Plath said that her personal experience is very important, but it should be relevant to larger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on. This means that the frustration and anger against a dominating father, or anyone for that matter, becomes a starting point or central symbol for larger issues. The theme of universal female protest in the modern world is the most striking one in the poem. The female speaker represents the creative force and she is angry with the destructive forces symbolized by males.

However, they also serve to establish the horrific atmosphere than be understood as patriarchy, as a society of consumers, or as simply cruel humans. No matter how one interprets the crowd in the poem, they complicate the poem's meaning so that it is a sophisticated exploration of the responsibility that one has for unhappiness, rather than simply a dire, depressive suicide note. She compares herself to Phoenix because each time she rises again from her ashes. She rebuilds herself to face the next episodes of her life. In many ways Plath's subject is the total purification of achieved death. It is also intimately concerned with the drift of Plath's life. She seems to believe she will reach perfection through escaping her body.

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