

Throughout "Lady Lazarus," the speaker uses extended metaphors of death and resurrection to express her own personal suffering. The speaker compares herself to Lazarus (a biblical reference to a man Jesus raised from the dead), telling the reader that she has died multiple times, and is, in fact, dead when the poem begins. However, through external forces, the speaker is brought back to life time and time again. For Lazarus, his resurrection was a joyous event, and one might assume that all such resurrections would be happy. But the speaker of the poem subverts that expectation: she wants to die. And so the efforts of those who want to save her—whether loved ones, or doctors, or whoever else—feel to the speaker like selfish, controlling acts committed against her wishes. Obviously, the speaker is not actually dead, but uses this metaphor to demonstrate how unbearable life is and, in turn, explain (and perhaps justify) her suicide attempts. Thus, the reader can interpret the poem as the musings of a suicidal mind, with death being alternately presented as freedom, escape from suffering, and the achievement of a sort of peace. Throughout the poem, the speaker often contrasts life and death by using imagery that subverts the reader's expectations. Note how the speaker describes life through disturbing images, such as comparing her skin to a "Nazi lampshade," or describing her resurrection as "flesh / the grave cave ate will be / at home on me." For instance, when the speaker describes her second suicide attempt, the imagery evokes the peacefulness of the sea: the speaker tells the reader she "rocked shut," alluding to the rhythmic, calming waves of the ocean, while the "worms" or maggots that invade a decaying corpse are depicted as "pearls." The speaker also transforms into a "seashell," shedding her skin to become a creature with a hard, outer shell, implying that for her death offers blissful solitude and protection.