

Sartre's Theories and Sylvia Plath's Poem Lady Lazarus

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After reading Sartre's Essays in Existentialism, I evaluated Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus" according to my interpretation of Sartre's philosophy, then used this aesthetic impression to evaluate the efficacy of [Sartre](#)'s theories as they apply toward evaluating and understanding art. If you have not read the poem in question, I suggest you go here to check it out before reading this essay.

"We write our own destiny -- we become what we do." -- Madame Chiang Kai-Shek

When a reader experiences Sylvia [Plath](#), immediately he is aware that he has never read anything like it. Other poets may have similar styles, treat on similar themes -- they may even have worked on the same ideas at the same time or been compared as equals -- but none so wholly creates a personal yet open world and method of existence as Plath.

Jean-Paul Sartre emphasized the importance of understanding the individual artist as she

relates to her work. It is through the existence the artist creates that we gain access to a way in which to understand them. To evaluate an artist's work is to experience an artist's existence and reality as she has defined it.

Sartre contended that there is no universal human nature. Unlike Hegel's principle of historicism which describes an ever-evolving human character present at any historical epoch, Sartre believed that it is in fact our existence which precedes our essence, such that by our action, we define what we become.

[Sylvia Plath](#) firmly believed that she was the shaper of her destiny, that she was ultimately free to become what she would become and as such ultimately responsible for making herself what she knew she needed to be. In her poem "Lady ...

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...ententially completely missing universal truths that may be revealed in art (forsaking the idea that anything can be universally true about humanity), Sartre nevertheless provides an engaging and thoughtful method of interpreting and understanding the artists and work which we encounter. Potentially limited by its scope in recent history, such that we cannot possibly have as personal and direct access to the thoughts and psychology of anonymous artisans in ancient history, Sartre's method is no less accurate in the things which it reveals. If we consider the creation of art as an action both limited by and capable of transcending its historical epoch, then work such as Plath's can become important and successful for the essence it reveals, whether understood in its historical context or simply enjoyed and preserved for something aesthetically and essentially pleasing.

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