

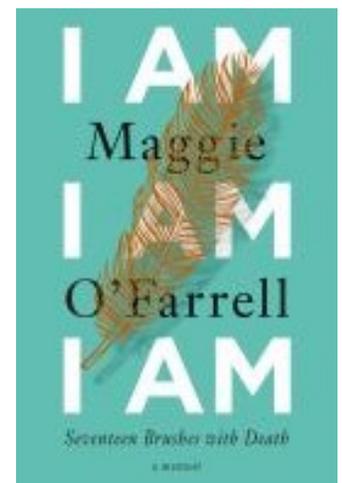


I Am, I Am, I Am: Seventeen Brushes With Death

Maggie O'Farrell

Discussion Questions

1. The title of the book comes from a passage in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, in which a character seems to be reminding herself she's still alive. Why is this an apt title for this memoir?
2. O'Farrell skips around in time rather than telling her stories chronologically. Why do you think she does this? What effect does it have on the reader?
3. Why has O'Farrell had so many near-death experiences—is she merely unlucky, or does something else explain it?
4. In "Neck," O'Farrell describes her job at a retreat: "I clear away human traces, erasing all evidence that they have eaten, slept, made love, argued, washed, worn clothes, read newspapers, shed hair and skin and bristle and blood and toenails." (page 5) Why does she view her work this way? What does it tell us about her?
5. We learn about O'Farrell's neurological condition in "Lungs" (2000), when she seems to be on her way to drowning. What drives her to risk her life like this, when she knows her own limitations?
6. The chapter in which O'Farrell narrowly avoids being hit by a car is called "Spine, Legs, Pelvis, Abdomen, Head." What does this refer to?
7. Several times in "Daughter," O'Farrell wonders what she did to cause her daughter's condition. Why does she seek to blame herself?
8. O'Farrell ends her memoir with an echo to the title: "She is, she is, she is." Why does this phrase resonate with her?





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About the Author

Born in Northern Ireland in 1972, Maggie O'Farrell grew up in Wales and Scotland and now lives in London. She has worked as a waitress, chambermaid, bike messenger, teacher, and arts administrator, as a journalist in Hong Kong and London, and as the deputy literary editor of *The Independent on Sunday*. Her debut novel, *After You'd Gone* (2000), won a Betty Trask Award and was followed by *My Lover's Lover* (2002); *The Distance Between Us* (2004), winner of a Somerset Maugham Award; *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox* (2006); *The Hand That First Held Mine* (2010); Costa Book Award winner *Instructions for a Heatwave* (2013); and, most recently, *This Must Be the Place* (2016). www.maggieofarrell.com

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