

Death and Life

Perhaps you've heard someone say something like "I died a little bit on the inside" before. Just as there are literal lives and deaths, there are also metaphoric rebirths and deaths. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë confronts many different kinds of "deaths" and the relationship between death and new life.

The first type of death dealt with in *Jane Eyre* is social death. The character of Jane Eyre is frequently on the fringes of social structure; when she is an outcast at Aunt Reed's house, when she is publicly shamed at Lowood School, and when she leaves Thornfield to become a beggar. The character of Bertha Mason also experiences a social death because of her isolation from society, where she is physically locked away.

The second type of death, mental death, is experienced by Jane and Bertha. Throughout the novel, Jane goes from orphan to poor student, to governess, to beggar, to being rich, and finally to resolution after her marriage to Mr. Rochester. Through each of these incarnations, Jane experiences mental anguish and dissonance. Jane's spirit is crushed several times, while Bertha goes insane and loses her mental faculties.

The most frequent kind of death in *Jane Eyre*, though, is physical death. The death of Jane's parents enables her life with Aunt Reed and the death of her uncle enables life at Lowood School. The death of Helen Burns impacts how Jane lives, and teaches her how to survive at Lowood. The death of Aunt Reed enables her daughters, Eliza and Georgiana, to have independent lives. The death of Jane's uncle allows her to receive her inheritance. The death of Bertha enables Jane's life with Edward to begin.

And finally, there is symbolic death. The death of Jane Eyre isn't a physical one. It is when she assumes the name Jane Elliott. When Jane assumes the surname Elliott, Jane Eyre dies. When Edward and Jane's marriage falls apart, or you could say "dies," Jane is able to find relatives as well as end her tenure at Thornfield. The death of Thornfield also brings about changes as it inspires new life for Jane and Edward. Lastly, the "death" of Edward's hand and eyesight represent a loss of power which is gained by Jane, who is now his caretaker.

This recurring theme of death and rebirth progresses the plot of the story, opening the door to new births which further serve the theme and story. Who knew reincarnation would be such a prominent theme in a Gothic work?
