

2018 Wuthering Heights | Sample Essay

**"Emily Bronte's portrayal of love and marriage in her novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is entirely negative."
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the above statement. Support your answer with reference to the text.**

In Emily Bronte's 'Wuthering Heights', we are given various portrayals of love and marriage. I do not believe that each portrayal is entirely negative, however I would agree that not much good came from any of the relationships (platonic or romantic) in the novel. Instead of "negative", I would say that Bronte's portrayals are more realistic. Love and marriage often involve a great deal of heartbreak, sadness and perhaps tragedy. Romance novels in Bronte's time, told the tales of dashing young heroes, falling in love with poor maidens and everyone always lived happily ever after. In real life, such fairy-tales are never the case. In this essay, I will be discussing the relationships between the characters in 'Wuthering Heights' and the role that love plays in each of the respective marriages.

Firstly, Hindley and Frances. This is the single marriage in the novel that refutes the statement that its portrayal is entirely negative. Hindley's youth consisted of him bullying Heathcliff, something that did not cease, even after the death of Mr. Earnshaw. Once Hindley was of age, Mr. Earnshaw sent him away to college. It was there that Hindley found his wife, Frances. However, we only meet Frances when she and Hindley return for Mr. Earnshaw's funeral. It appears that they were married based on love rather than a forced arrangement, as Nelly Dean comments that Frances must be a woman with "*neither money nor name to recommend her, or he would scarcely have kept the union from his father.*" This suggests that Frances was from a modest background and that Hindley did not marry her for her wealth. Although we do not encounter much of Frances, she has a substantial impact on the way Hindley's character develops throughout. In a way, Hindley and Frances were fortunate to have found one another, away from the constraints of Wuthering Heights. When he returns from college, he is apparently a greatly altered man in dress and in aspect. He had grown "*sparer, and*

had lost his colour, and spoke and dressed quite differently." When Frances falls ill after the birth of their son, Hareton, Hindley dedicates himself to comforting and assuring her that she will survive, despite the terminal diagnosis of the doctor. However, after Frances's inevitable death, he descends into a life of misery, depravity, and insanity, *"his sorrow was of that kind that will not lament. He neither wept, nor prayed; he cursed and defied; execrated God and man, and gave himself up to reckless dissipation."* The old Hindley returns. The true love that he had found in Frances had been extinguished, leaving him a broken man. He abuses his young son Hareton, almost killing him by dropping him over the banisters, although Heathcliff accidentally saves him. He starts gambling his, undoubtedly sizeable, fortunes away. Hindley becomes tyrannical and evil, drowning his sorrows and falling deeper and deeper into a depressive state. While his marriage may have been the happiest one in the novel, its abrupt ending left Hindley a shell of his happiest self.

In contrast to Hindley and Frances, we have the marriage of Catherine and Edgar Linton. While their love and marriage weren't entirely negative, it was far from happy. During the first half of the book, Catherine showed different types of love for two different people. Her love for Heathcliff was her everything, it was her identity to love and live for Heathcliff. That love was intoxicating, both addicts sustained by each other. However, as soon as Catherine realised how society viewed Heathcliff, she sacrificed their love and married Edgar Linton. I believe that this was Catherine's first grave mistake in the novel. Catherine's love for Edgar wasn't natural because it was a love that she taught herself to feel, platonic. It might have come unknowingly to Catherine, but she did love Edgar as she said, *"My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees."* Catherine knew that it was not impossible to love Edgar for he was a sweet and kind gentleman, who would've given her the world. Edgar was somewhat of an easy target for Catherine. His love for her was unconditional and despite guessing of her feelings for Heathcliff, he married her. I don't believe that they were ever happy together. Their marriage was ill-fated from the beginning as Catherine always wanted the best of both worlds. When Heathcliff eventually returned and married Isabella, Catherine went insane through either sickness or rage. Loyal until the very end, Edgar stays by her side, never faltering. This prompts the reader to feel sympathy for Edgar, all he ever did was love Catherine. Although she humours Edgar in her infirmity, when the time comes, it is Heathcliff that she wants, *"Oh, don't go...it is the last time! Edgar will not hurt us. Heathcliff, I shall die!"* In Catherine's and Edgar's

relationship, there are clear themes of the turbulent class system and an urge to reach the top of the social hierarchy. Even on her deathbed, Edgar doesn't possess Catherine's true attention. There was always an underlying context that Heathcliff was Catherine's true 'soulmate'. It could be argued that Catherine and Edgar's daughter, Cathy, was a positive outcome of their marriage. Nevertheless, the young Cathy is decidedly unhappy in the novel which is perhaps a consequence of her parent's affliction but unlike her mother, she persists and eventually ends up marrying for love.

Isabella Linton's infatuation and eventual marriage to Heathcliff, was a source of great anguish in the novel. Her love was entirely one sided and I believe that their marriage signified the beginning of the end. Their marriage was, indeed, entirely negative. When Isabella married Heathcliff, she paid dearly for it by being disowned by Edgar and imprisoned at the Heights by Heathcliff. As readers, we knew that Isabella was making a mistake from the outset. As Catherine put it, Heathcliff would "*crush*" Isabella "*like a sparrow's egg if he found you a troublesome charge.*" Heathcliff may have been a physically changed man when he returned from his hiatus, but he remained a "*fierce, pitiless, wolfish man.*" Isabella pays no heed to Catherine's warning and pursues Heathcliff anyway, who is all too delighted to exact his revenge on the Lintons'. Perhaps, Catherine may have been somewhat jealous of Isabella, as her sister-in-law had the courage to marry Heathcliff, something that Catherine would never have done. However, Isabella realises her gross mistake promptly after their abrupt marriage, which she details in her multiple letters to both Edgar and Nelly. She begs for their forgiveness, their help and the safety of Thrushcross Grange. Her pleas fall on deaf ears as Edgar refused to even read them. Always the independent woman, Isabella escaped with her newborn baby to London. If only she had taken the hint about his true character when he strung up her poor dog in the garden! Heathcliff remained at Wuthering Heights to live out his days in misery, his toxic and violent marriage long forgotten.

To conclude, I believe that Emily Bronte's portrayal of love and marriage is not entirely negative. While Hindley's marriage to Frances ended in a rather untimely way, they still loved each other and were happy together. Her death shattered Hindley. Edgar's love for Catherine remained steadfast, despite the emotional grenades she frequently threw in his direction. They were never destined to be content together and I think Edgar was aware of this. In a way, he was the most authentic and genuine character. After Catherine's death, Edgar cherished his daughter,

Cathy, and loved her wholeheartedly until he died. Isabella Linton's marriage to Heathcliff was an impending calamity from the very first day. For him, it was a marriage of both convenience and revenge. They eventually went their separate ways, the best way it could've concluded, considering how the other marriages in the novel ended. All in all, Bronte leaves room for a very minute amount of positivity, which is portrayed through the love that characters have for one another, however misguided their feelings are. *"He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same."*