

Extended Essay English B

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To what extent, influence of the 18th century England's social and economic status affected the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff in the novel "Wuthering Heights" by Emily Brontë and the relationship between Mr. Rochester and Jane in the novel "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë.

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Abstract

This essay examines the influence of the social and economic status of 18th century England on the relationships between Wuthering Heights' Catherine and Heathcliff and Jane Eyre's Jane and Mr. Rochester. It also includes the characteristic developments of the mentioned characters, for the novels include most of their childhood. The influence of 18th century England on the characters' decisions are also discussed.

In this essay, the main aim is not to compare the relationships in the books; but to examine them individually, so that the influence of 18th century England can be discussed on different relationships.

Although there are more relationships that the characters have that are good examples for the essay's aim, more proves and discussions are available in the novels for the main characters, the characters that are used in this essay.

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Introduction

According to the concept of 'love', a man's and a woman's perception of each other varies depending on their needs. An individual who is in a relationship, perceives his or her spouse as the other half of his or her being, as he or she is in need of being supported and sharing his or her experiences. Besides affection, in a strong, healthy relationship the sharing of moral values and emotions such as happiness, sadness, death, fear and even guilt is as much important as sharing materialistic values, such as wealth and position.

The ways of perception do not only vary according to needs. Class difference, culture, education, social and economic status religious views and social pressure have severe effects on the way that the individual perceives his or her spouse. In 18th century England, some of these values were more important in a case of marriage than the presence of affection or even an understanding between the individuals. Marriage was more like a deal than a merge of two people in love; because a divorce was very hard, the couple was united until one of their death; due to the belief that the exchange of vows had taken place in front of God and it was unbreakable. Also a woman and a man was not equal in a marriage, a woman must always be owned by her father, her brother and later her husband. Everything she inherited from her family then becomes her husband's property when married. The family line of the individual, whether or not his or her blood had nobility, his or her wealth and position were three most important things for the individuals search for a spouse in 18th century England.

In the novel "Wuthering Heights" by Emily Brontë, the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine and their relationships with other characters were shaped according to these values rather than the respect or the love they had for others and each other. In the novel "Jane Eyre"

by Charlotte Brontë, before asking Jane her hand in marriage, Mr. Rochester tested her to ensure that she liked his character rather than his wealth.

Section One: Wuthering Heights

The setting of the novel, “Wuthering Heights”, by Emily Brontë, allows the examination of both Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s childhoods and their lives as mature individuals. The narration, done by Mrs. ‘Nelly’ Dean, allows the recognition of society’s expectations from Catherine and Heathcliff. Therefore, their characteristic developments and how their relationship formed and were, in the boundaries of the social and economical status of the 18th century England, can be studied.

Heathcliff has none of the qualities of a respectable gentlemen should have in 18th century England. The whereabouts and the identities of his mother and his father is unknown. His slightly darker skin color indicates that he is a member of the gypsies who are not considered as a member of the higher classes of the society, because of their skin tone and their life style, hence Heathcliff is not considered as an equal or liked by the Earnshaw family members, in the exception of Mr. Earnshaw and Catherine.

“..yet when it was on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors: she did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gypsy brat into the house, when they had their own barns to feed and fend for?”¹

¹ P.37, Brontë, Wuthering Heights. Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005

Mr. Earnshaw is very fond of Heathcliff. He isn't rude or wild as his daughter, Catherine or is not spoiled like Hindley, as the child who will inherit everything that Mr. Earnshaw owned. These make Heathcliff the favourite in Mr. Earnshaw's eyes and a source of hatred in others'. *"Hindley hated him: and so to say the truth I did the same; and we plagued and went on him shamefully: for I wasn't reasonable enough to feel my injustice, and the mistress never put in a word on his behalf when she saw him wronged."*² After the deaths of the parent Earnshaw's, Hindley takes over the estate. He is in the belief of that Heathcliff is responsible for his father's lack of interest in him, so he takes away the only chance that Heathcliff might have to become a member of the higher society; his education.

Catherine is the only female child of the Earnshaw family. She is enforced both by her gender and her family to act and eventually turn into a lady with good qualities. Her gender makes her only aim in life to become a good wife to a equally, or preferably, to a higher statused man. Her education is based on this purpose. However, her wild and rude behaviour, her desire for freedom and her selfish acts decreases her chances greatly; making her to be punished to teach her manners and protect the family's reputation.

*"and Cathy, when she learned the master had lost her whip in attending on the stranger, showed her humour by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing; earning for her pains a sound blow from her father, to teach her cleaner manners."*³

This kind of disrespectful behaviour do not seem to be disliked by Heathcliff.

The relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is very different. During their childhood, especially after Mr. Earnshaw's death, they seemed to be very close. Before Mr. Earnshaw's death, his and the society's expectations from Catherine do not really match with her desires.

² P.38, Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

³ P.37, Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

She is always reminded that she should act like a lady, whenever she reacts naturally to an occasion, so she couldn't be herself. Heathcliff, who do not expect and is not expected much from, is a perfect shelter for her to unmask her act. On the other hand, for Heathcliff, Catherine is both a symbol of affection and a good company. Heathcliff associates Catherine's rudeness and wildness from his early childhood, his gypsy origins, and is comfortable resurfacing them next to Catherine. Thereby, they are bounded to each other out of necessity.

This bonding is so strong that they perceive each other as the same: "*...but because he is more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.*"⁴ However, their perception of the world is limited with Wuthering Heights. They are in the belief that, their biggest enemies are Joseph and Hindley and they will always be together. This changes when Catherine meets the Lintons.

Seeing and getting to know Isabella and Edgar Linton is a whole new experience for Catherine. They are the symbol of politeness, elegance and intellectuality. Three absolutely foreign concepts to Catherine and three absolutely necessary qualities that an individual should possess.

In her five weeks at Thrushcross Grange, as an injured guest, Catherine sees and studies the manners of the Lintons. After realising the fact that her ordinary behaviour isn't welcomed at the Grange, she starts to act more like a lady.

⁴ P.80, Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

Edgar is a new kind of man to Catherine, very different from Hindley, Heathcliff and Joseph. He helps her realise that there is a outside world of the Wuthering Heights and other man than her aquatinces. She starts to think about her future and her place in the town society. Catherine than understands, although he is her soulmate Heathcliff is lack of the qualities to provide her of her needs.

*“She gazed concernedly at the dusky fingers she held in her own, and also at her dress; which she feared had gained no embellishment from its contact with his. ‘You needn’t have touched me!’ he answered, following her eye and snatching away his hand. ‘I shall be as dirty as I please: and I like to be dirty, and I will be dirty.’”*⁵

Catherine has difficulties controlling her real- self, and near Heatchcliff it becomes even harder. She startes to drive away from him and gives all her attention on Edgar.

Edgar Linton is handsome, and pleasent to be with and also young and cheerful; and he is in loves with Catherine. *“and he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband.”*⁶ The quation indicates Catherine’s perception of Edgar, he is the perfect husband with all his qualities *“for a girl of twenty- two”*⁷. However, her bonding to Heathcliff is very deep, because he is the only one that she can stop acting in front of; but her desire for a high social status overcomes her desires to be with him.

*“I have no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn’t have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him.”*⁸

⁵ P.54, Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

⁶ P.78, Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

⁷ P.77, Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

⁸ P.80, Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights after Catherine is married to Edgar for six months. He has gained wealth, questionable by honorable means; because it is hard for a nameless man to obtain such wealth although it is post industrial evolution which with emperalism made the money flow into England. It is later acknowledged that Heathcliff is also talented in gambling which is probably how he gains money. Rather than wealth Heathcliff is also different in looks and manners. He seems like he has understood that he should be careful with his actions if he wants to be accepted in the society so he could fulfill his plan of revenge.

Catherine is thrilled with Heathcliff's return and their affections for each other surface, making Edgar jealous. Visits start between Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights where Hindley invited Heathcliff to stay in the hope of taking all his money in gambling. Isabella starts to develop feelings for Heathcliff, charmed by his manners and Heathcliff does nothing to discourage. Catherine though a little jealous forces Heathclif to come clean about Isabella and marry her if he loves her. Heathcliff becomes furious to Catherine that she could think that Heathcliff could love anyone else but Catherine. He declares his aim of taking revenge on her and Edgar. When their shoutings reach his inability to deal with Heathcliff alone makes Catherine think that she made a wrong choice. Edgar is not man enough for her although he is wealthy respected and a member of the high society when she confronts him about it, Edgar becomes furious and forces her to choose between him and Heathcliff, in which she replies by locking herself up and refusing to eat.

It is later learned that Catherine's pregnant and thinks that she is going to die when she is delivering the baby. Isabella and Heathcliff unite and move to Wuthering Heights, causing Edgar to say that her sister had disowned him, which is a huge difference than him disowning

her which would make her a complete stranger to the Linton House in an dishonorable way. Catherine pleas to see Heathcliff before her death and Nelly finally gives in. When they unite they declare their love for each other but still full of hatred for ruining each others lives. Catherine dies after the confront and Heathcliff asks for her spirit to haunt him so that he could never be left without Catherine.

Section Two: Jane Eyre

In the novel “Jane Eyre” by Charlotte Brontë; the first- person narration given by Jane, leads the setting to allow an insight to Jane’s childhood and her adolscent life as an individual. The narration also allows the recognition of society’s pressure on Jane and how she had to hide herself to fit the society’s expectations whereas the examination of Mr. Rochester and his character could be studied by the conversations had in the lone time he and Jane share in the Thornfield Mansion. Although there is no knowledge of the actual setting, a book, that was introduced as newly published, is given to Jane by St. John Rivers, when she is a teacher at Morton, called ‘Marmion’. The publishing date of it, is the year 1808⁹ which indicates that the novel takes place in early 1800s and in late 1700s. Hence, the effect social and economic status of 18th century England on Jane and her relationship with Mr. Rochester can be studied in detail.

The novel’s protagonist and narrator Jane Eyre is first introduced as an orphan living in Gateshead with her aunt and cousins, the Reeds. Though, she is with her blood relatives Reeds’ lack of behaviour of making her feel like she is a part of the family leads to an unhappy childhood of Jane. The reasons of this attitude are later recognised as the pressure of

⁹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marmion_\(poem\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marmion_(poem))

the society and the importance of family name. Jane's mother as a respectable member of the wealthy Reed family was strongly disapproved and was written out of the will by her own father; because of her choice of a husband, Jane's father, who is lack of all the qualities that a respectable gentleman should have to be a qualified husband. He is not rich, not a member of a respectable higher statused family and only a clergyman, a job for lower- classed.

The consequences of Jane's mother's actions were severe both for Jane and her mother. Her mother was forced to stop her relations with the Reed family, including her brothers so that the family name and honour could be protected. Although Uncle Reed had deep affections towards his sister he could not show that until her death out of fear of losing his reputation. Taking in Jane and treating her as one of his own was to ease his conscience and he made his wife promise to maintain these actions.

Aunt Reed is a very important character in Jane's life. She is not pleased with the fact that her husband had brought in an orphan who is a proof of the shameful history of the family. She is a good reflection of the society's pressure on Jane. After Uncle Reed's death Jane finds herself as the source of every problem in Gateshead. Her actions to protect herself from her cousin John and her hiding to avoid any complications are being punished although she is not the one to blame because according to Aunt Reed the reason for her guilt is that she is not truly noble and not a complete member of the Reed family which is constantly repeated to Jane who comes from a loving home and finds these concepts very foreign. Her nature changes. Her constantly being expected to be wild, rude and lack of manner makes her believe she has become one. She starts to feel hatred towards her Aunt for her injustice conclusions.

"I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to visit you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how

*you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick...*¹⁰ This hatred arouses a desire to fight the society and become more powerful than her aunt. This is made possible by her being sent to Lowood.

Lowood, a school for orphan girls, when under Mr. Brocklehurst's management is a place of cruelty and harsh conditions. Her only comforts are Miss Temple and Helen and she completely relies on them. Helen is a religious girl who blames herself for every treatment she gets. This passive attitude is against Jane's character. She does not accept that people should be treated according to their income or their family line and thinks that they are not a reason to humiliate a person. *"When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard... So as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again."*¹¹ However her ideas about the way of striking back changes after Helen's death and Mr. Brocklehurst's dismissal and Miss Temple's influence on her increases greatly. Miss Temple is a role model for Jane, her good and kind nature, her ability to be self-sufficient without a name or a husband are some of the qualities that attract her. She starts to involuntarily fight back, to the society and to her aunt by being educated. She becomes an accepted individual in the society as a teacher despite the fact that she is an orphan. After the departure of Miss Temple from Lowood she finds herself a job in Thornfield as a governess, taking the first step as an independent individual in the society.

Mr. Rochester, the owner of Thornfield, is a very self-conscious man. This makes the elements from his past, how he obtained the characteristic qualities he has and the reasons for his actions very unclear. The only ways these could be studied are the conversations, where he shares his experiences in life, with Jane and the actions he takes near her. If the overall events

¹⁰ P.45, Brontë, Jane Eyre. Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005

¹¹ P.78, Brontë, Jane Eyre.

and conversations that took place between Jane and Mr. Rochester throughout the novel are taken into consideration it would be concluded that Mr. Rochester is a man that is aware of the advantages and the disadvantages money could bring. “‘Do you think I’m ugly Jane?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Are you sure the smoke coming from the fireplace that is lit by my money make me look prettier?’”¹² His wealth caused him to be unloved, deceived and alone, whereas making him a respectable member and a good qualified potential of the society. Mr. Rochester was deceived by his brother and his father to keep the family fortune undivided. He was forced to marry Bertha, who will become an obstacle between him and Jane, for her 30.000 pound of inheritance which father Rochester thought was enough for his second son and regardless of her potential to become mad. When Mr. Rochester surfaced his family’s plot, they were already dead and he was trapped in Thornfield with a lot of money and a mad wife. He used that money to travel and to get away from Thornfield where the proof of his family betrayal was kept. His travels and his relationship with Adele’s mother who he caught cheating on him and whom he heard saying that “his poor looks were disguised by the smell of his money.”¹³ was enough proof for him to show the phoniness that money could bring. His travels then continued with leaving Adele as his second proof back in Thornfield in search for a woman that would love him for who he is. He developed tests and methods to distinguish the women, posing as a gypsy to test Jane and other guests.

The close relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester is formed by their conversations that took place during their walks in the garden, the conversations which Jane learns about Mr. Rochester and his old life. They share a trustworthy and honest relationship which Mr. Rochester was in search of. Jane realizes she has developed feelings for Mr. Rochester after

¹² P.149, Brontë, Jane Eyre.

¹³ P.167, Brontë, Jane Eyre.

the jealousy she felt when a potential linkage of Mr. Rochester and Miss Blanche Ingram is spoken of.

Miss Blanche Ingram is a symbol of the typical high- classed women in the 18th century. She is a qualified rider and piano player with beautiful looks and a good family honour and wealth. She has all the qualities of the kind of wife that men are in search of. However her true intensions are surfaced when Mr. Rochester poses as if he was a gypsy and made up a story about how he has a much smaller amount than she thinks he had. This shows its effect immediately when he tells Jane in enjoyment that he was welcomed very coldly by the Ingrams after the incident.

The acceptance of the love they share for each other is a turn point in Jane's and Mr. Rochester's life. Jane for not having to lose the man that make Thornfield feel like home to her and Mr. Rochester for finding the trust, honesty and love that he was in search for. However, Jane's anxiety arouses when she feels uncomfortable about Mr. Rochester's gifts and attempts to make her more feminine. Mrs. Fairfax's disapproval of the marriage is not a comforting fact either which also proves the society is patriarchal. Mrs. Fairfax blames Jane as the founder of the relationship between her and Mr. Rochester. Jane worries that she would be dependent to Mr. Rochester fully and lose her individuality and equality. This can be concluded from the effort she made to contact her long- lost- Uncle John about the amount of money she will inherit so that she could feel like she has a participation in the relationship and ease the pressure of the class distinction between her and Mr. Rochester.

The surfacing of Bertha Mason is a huge knock on Jane's and Mr. Rochester's relationship. Jane feels lonely, lost, deceived and also full of shame for because she almost became a

mistress and nothing more than that. The inability of Mr. Rochester to get a divorce due to present laws prevents them from merging in an honorable way. Jane decides to leave Thornfield as she doesn't trust herself with Mr. Rochester if they would decide to wait for Bertha's death.

In the year that Jane spends away from Thornfield, she is completed in lots of ways that were incomplete most of her life. She found her family from the father side, The Rivers, received her inheritance from her Uncle John, found a job as a teacher in the school Morton. Although she was pretty occupied she always had time to think about Mr. Rochester and his well-being. When St. John asked for her hand in marriage so that they could be missionaries and travel the world, because laws prevented a man and a woman to travel in an honorable way, the exceptions being the man is the husband, the brother or the father. Jane disagrees with the idea knowing St. John's love for another woman and asks him why he doesn't ask her instead which he answers by saying that the woman is not qualified for the job of being a missionary's wife. Jane realizes she could not marry St. John because they do not share a mutual love and returns to Thornfield to find Mr. Rochester, the man she really loves.

She finds Thornfield as a ruin and gets worried of Mr. Rochester's health. She learns that Mr. Rochester had lost his wife, his hand and his eyes during the fire. Traveling to the house that Mr. Rochester now stayed she finds him dependent, alone and still in love with Jane. Jane now must be the woman that Mr. Rochester would depend on and they would be equals with now she having money, eyes and a hand.

Conclusion

Considering all the events that took place in the character's lives, it can be concluded that the influence of the social and economic status of the 18th century England on their relationships of the main characters of novels Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre are great. Although the books are individually discussed, the characters decisions are similar for their choice of a spouse, which is due to the similar era and situations of the characters.

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