

# THE IMPACTS OF FAKE MARRIAGE IN TESS WAKEFIELD'S NOVEL *PURPLE HEARTS*

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Received: 2025-05-03

Accepted: 2025-05-17

Published: 2025-05-28

## Abstract

Fake marriages, though often portrayed as harmless arrangements in fictional narratives, can lead to complex and far-reaching consequences in the lives of the characters involved. This study aims to explore the negative impacts of a fake marriage on the protagonist's life in Tess Wakefield's novel *Purple Hearts*. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study uses M.H. Abrams' theory of literary analysis as its primary analytical framework. Additional relevant theories are incorporated to support the interpretation of the data. The analysis reveals that the fake marriage in the novel results in several negative consequences, including legal, financial, and emotional repercussions. The protagonist engages in the marriage to resolve personal financial difficulties. Despite these challenges, the characters—Cassie and Luke—eventually develop genuine affection, suggesting a transformative journey shaped by their experiences. The study highlights how a fake marriage, initially entered into for practical reasons, can evolve into a meaningful relationship, albeit through significant personal and relational struggles. These findings underscore the complex emotional and ethical dimensions of such arrangements in contemporary fiction.

**Keywords:** *emotional consequence; fake marriage; financial consequence; legal consequence; protagonist*

## 1. Introduction

Tess Wakefield's *Purple Hearts* offers a contemporary exploration of love, survival, and moral ambiguity through the lens of a contract marriage. The novel follows two central characters—Luke Morrow, a soldier burdened with debt, and Cassie Salazar, a struggling musician battling diabetes—who agree to a fake marriage to access military health benefits. Although their union begins as a mutually beneficial arrangement, it gradually unfolds into a complex emotional journey marked by tension, deception, and evolving intimacy. This narrative premise is not only compelling but also socially relevant, reflecting issues of economic hardship, ethical boundaries, and emotional vulnerability in modern relationships.

The depiction of fake marriage in *Purple Hearts* raises critical questions about the psychological and social consequences of relational deception. According to Weninger and Williams (2022) in Pardi et al. (2024), such arrangements can be viewed

as relational transgressions—behaviors that damage or violate trust and social norms in personal or communal relationships. These transgressions often involve power imbalances and emotional strain, making them important subjects for literary and sociocultural inquiry.

In particular, the concept of fake or "fatuous" love, as described by Sternberg (1986), is highly relevant to this study. Sternberg characterizes fatuous love as a relationship driven by passion and commitment but lacking intimacy—often resulting in instability. This theoretical perspective provides a useful framework for understanding the evolving dynamics between Luke and Cassie as they navigate the consequences of their fabricated relationship.

Given these considerations, *Purple Hearts* is a significant literary work for examining the personal and interpersonal impacts of fake marriage. While the novel is popular for its romantic storyline, this study focuses specifically on its darker thematic undertones—especially the negative consequences the protagonists experience as a result of their deception.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impacts of fake marriage on the protagonists' lives in Tess Wakefield's *Purple Hearts*, emphasizing the legal, financial, and emotional consequences as depicted in the narrative. The analysis is situated within the broader context of literary socialization and relational ethics.

## 2. Literature Review

In fiction, characters are often portrayed as representations of real human beings. Through their behavior, traits, and the way they are described, authors create figures who are relatable—evoking empathy, admiration, and at times, even our support. Among these, the central figure in a story is commonly referred to as the protagonist, while the opposing force is known as the antagonist. As Subhan (2003) notes, the protagonist typically plays a crucial role in shaping the course of the narrative and is often positioned as the hero. Nurgiyantoro (2010) further explains that protagonists usually reflect values and characteristics that resonate with readers. They face challenges that mirror our own and respond to them in ways that feel familiar and believable. While these characters are, in essence, products of the author's imagination, they hold an essential place in the development of the story's plot.

Themes of marriage often emerge in novels, reflecting its importance in both personal and societal life. At its core, marriage is a formal commitment made between two individuals, typically carried out in accordance with religious, legal, and social norms. Wedding ceremonies vary widely across cultures, shaped by traditions based on ethnicity, religion, and social status. Some are deeply rooted in specific religious practices or legal frameworks. In most cases, a marriage becomes legally binding when the parties sign an official document, while the ceremonial aspects offer an opportunity for cultural expression and celebration with family and friends. The individuals involved are called brides and grooms during the ceremony and become husband and wife afterward. In essence, marriage represents a sacred agreement between a man and a woman to build a joyful and meaningful family life, anchored in mutual promises made before God Almighty.

However, not all marriages are rooted in such ideals. The phenomenon of fake or contract marriages reflects a more modern and materialistic societal structure, where economic interests often overshadow emotional or spiritual considerations. As Kartono (2006) observes, in such arrangements, financial motives can significantly influence the

decision to marry, turning the institution into a form of business transaction that yields material gain. Contract marriages, also known as fake marriages, are typically preceded by a mutual agreement between the parties—often including predetermined terms such as the duration of the marriage, financial compensation, and the respective rights and responsibilities of each party. Al-Musayyar (2008) defines such marriages as religiously valid, provided that they fulfill the essential conditions and pillars of marriage. In this framework, both the husband and wife are still required to uphold their obligations to each other as stipulated in the contract.

Susanto (2007) mentions several reasons regarding contract marriages, there are several things that underlie the contract marriages, including:

a. Economic Difficulties

This reason is the most basic reason for women or brides to want to carry out contract marriages, with the compensation from contract marriages they think they will get money and be able to improve their economic level and fulfil the needs of daily life.

b. Avoiding Adultery

As explained in the history of contract marriages, some Arabs carry out contract marriages with the aim of fulfilling their biological needs without having to commit adultery, namely through legal marriage according to religious law.

c. Cultural and Environmental Factors

The culture of contract marriage nowadays has considered normal and has become a business community, especially in certain areas that have large industrial areas or advanced tourisms and are also supported by the surrounding communities for their aims to improve welfare.

Fake marriage creates some impacts for those who commit it. In addition, fake marriage is a serious crime in some countries in the world. Meanwhile for the family, this kind of marriage is also considered a betrayal to the family for in the name of love. Besides, fake marriage also might give a psychological damage for those who commit as they feel uneasy for telling a lie to everyone and the possibility of being scolded by relatives when their fake marriage revealed out, it might lead to stress and depressions as well.

According Abrams (2012), there are some impact of fake marriage: legal, financial, and emotional consequences.

a. Legal Consequences

Marriage fraud or fake marriage is a federal crime in most countries in the world especially in the United States. Faking a marriage is considered a federal offense punishable by law. If caught, individuals involved in marriage fraud can face criminal charges and deportation (for immigrant). In addition, fake marriages can be annulled, which means that the marriage is declared null and void, and the parties are treated as if they were never married.

b. Financial Consequences

Fake marriage can have financial Consequences for both parties involved. For example, if one party is using the marriage to obtain some benefits, the other party may be financially exploited. In addition, if the marriage is annulled, the parties may have to divide their assets and debts as if they were never married.

c. Emotional Consequences

Fake marriage can have emotional consequences for both parties involved. For example, if one party is using the marriage to obtain immigration benefits, the other party may feel betrayed and hurt. When the marriage is annulled, there will be a chance that both the parties experience emotional distress due to the breakdown of the relationship.

### 3. Research Method

This study employs a **qualitative descriptive** approach to explore the portrayal and implications of fake marriage in Tess Wakefield's novel *Purple Hearts*. As defined by Moleong (in Siregar, Nasution, & Pardi, 2022), qualitative research aims to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from observable phenomena, emphasizing meaning, experience, and interpretation rather than numerical data. In line with Pratiwy et al. (2023), this study focuses on capturing and describing the phenomena found in the literary text, particularly how fake marriage is constructed and its effects on the characters.

The primary object of analysis is the novel *Purple Hearts* by Tess Wakefield, which serves as the main source of data. The data collection technique involves close reading and textual analysis, particularly using quoting and noting strategies as outlined by Sutopo (2005) and Sugiyono (2009), though the use of Sugiyono here is limited to the practical aspect of data management. The researcher systematically identifies, selects, and extracts textual evidence relevant to the research questions, including quotes, dialogues, and narrative descriptions.

To guide the analysis, this study applies Abrams' mimetic theory, which views literature as a reflection or imitation of human life and social reality. Abrams (1953) positions the mimetic approach as one that emphasizes the relationship between literary works and the external world, focusing on how texts mirror the experiences, behaviors, and values of real human beings. In this study, mimetic theory helps illuminate how the fictional representation of fake marriage in *Purple Hearts* corresponds to societal perceptions and lived realities.

The data analysis process follows the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Creswell (2013). This includes:

1. Data reduction, in which raw textual data are organized and selected based on relevance to the research focus (in this case, the types and consequences of fake marriage in the novel);
2. Data display, which involves categorizing the selected data into meaningful patterns;
3. Interpretation, in which the researcher reflects on the patterns and constructs conclusions in response to the research question.

To ensure the validity of findings, the study employs triangulation, comparing the textual analysis with insights from relevant scholarly literature and social commentary on marriage norms and practices (Suhadi et al., 2023). Supporting references from articles, books, and previous studies help contextualize and validate the interpretation of the novel's content.

### 4. Discussion

A fake marriage, also known as a sham marriage, refers to a union entered into by persons for ulterior motives, typically without the intention of establishing a genuine marital relationship. This practice is often associated with attempts to gain immigration

advantages or other legal benefits for both involved. The fake marriage between Cassie and Luke affects their personal lives in various ways. The impact of this fake marriage on their lives is significant, as it leads to a series of events that affect their relationship and future. Some of the impacts of the fake marriage on the protagonists' lives are as follow.

#### **4.1.1 Emotional Complications**

The term emotional complication is not widely defined as a standalone concept in psychological literature. However, it is often discussed in relation to emotional distress, emotional disorders, and challenges in emotion regulation. Emotional complexity refers to the capacity to experience a broad range of emotions that are well differentiated. People with high emotional complexity can identify and distinguish between various emotional states, which is associated with better psychological adaptability.

In Tess Wakefield's novel *Purple Hearts*, as they spend more time together, Cassie and Luke's fake marriage becomes complicated when real feelings soon blossom between them. They start to develop genuine feelings for each other, which causes emotional complications.

"It wasn't about just keeping up the lie anymore. I was worried about Luke. He wasn't the same. And it shouldn't have bothered me, but it did. I didn't want to create a bigger gap between us than there already was. Luke and I had to get through this together. Or we at least had to try." (Wakefield, 2017: 117)

It seems that Cassie is experiencing a range of emotions and is trying to navigate a complicated emotional situation. Here are some possible emotions and themes that can be inferred from the quotation:

**Worry:** Cassie is worried about Luke and how he is doing. This shows that Cassie cares about Luke and is invested in his well-being.

**Guilt:** Cassie feels guilty about keeping up a lie and creating a gap between them. It indicates that Cassie may have done something wrong and is struggling with the consequences of their actions.

**Desire for connection:** Cassie wants to get through this with Luke and not create a bigger gap between them. This implied that Cassie values her relationship with Luke and wants to maintain a connection with him. (Wakefield, 2017: 201)

The quotation above suggests that Cassie is experiencing a range of emotions and is trying to navigate a complicated emotional situation with Luke. Cassie cares about Luke and wants to maintain a connection with him, but is struggling with feelings of guilt and worry. The emotional complication in this quote also adds to the suspense and drama of the novel. This quote is a powerful example of how Tess Wakefields uses emotional complication to create a more engaging and emotionally resonant story.

This quotation also illustrates the emotional complications that arise from Luke's impending jail sentence. Cassie is feeling a range of emotions, including sadness, fear, and anger. She is also feeling guilty, because she feels like she is somehow responsible for Luke's situation. These emotions are all compounded by the fact that Cassie is trying to maintain a positive attitude in front of her bandmates.

The emotional complication in this quote is significant because it shows how Cassie's feelings are affecting her ability to function. She is unable to focus on the good news about the record deal, and she is starting to shake. This shows that she is overwhelmed by her emotions, and that she is struggling to cope with the situation.

#### 4.1.2 Financial Benefit

Financial benefit encompasses various advantages related to monetary gains, cost savings, or economic improvements. Experts across different fields have explored this concept in contexts such as personal finance, employee satisfaction, and health economics. In the novel, Cassie enters into the fake marriage with Luke to gain financial benefits. The fake marriage also leads to an increase in Luke's paycheck, which they split. Cassie enters into the fake marriage with Luke to gain access to better medical insurance to cover her medication for Diabetes. The marriage allows her to access better medical insurance, which helps her to pay off her medical bills and other expenses.

"I need to get married," I said. "I need better medical insurance."

"Why?" Luke asked. "You're young and healthy. "

"I have diabetes," I said. "And the medication is really expensive."

"Oh," Luke said. "I didn't know. "

"Yeah," I said. "It's not something I talk about a lot. "

"Well, I'm glad you told me," Luke said. "I'd be happy to marry you. "

"Really?" I asked.

"Yeah," Luke said. "It's not a big deal. And it will help you out. "

"Thank you," I said. "I really appreciate it." (Wakefield, 2017: 105)

The conversation above shows that Cassie's primary motivation for entering into a fake marriage is to gain access to better medical insurance. She has diabetes, and the medication is very expensive. She knows that if she is married to Luke, he will be able to provide her with better medical insurance. This will help her to pay off her medical bills and other expenses. Cassie is not expecting anything from Luke in terms of a romantic relationship. She knows that their marriage will be purely for financial reasons. She is willing to go through with it because she knows that it will help her out.

The fake marriage also leads to an increase in Luke's paycheck, which they split. This means that Cassie also benefits financially from the marriage. She is able to use this money to pay off her medical bills and other expenses.

#### 4.1.3 Legal Consequences

Legal consequences refer to the outcomes or sanctions that result from a person's actions or behavior in relation to the law. These consequences can arise when someone violates legal rules or obligations, and they vary depending on the nature and severity of the act. The fake marriage also has legal consequences. When their fake marriage is discovered, Luke is charged with fraud and detained by the military. Cassie faces no charges, but the legal proceedings add to her stress and anxiety.

"I'm being charged with fraud," Luke said. "They're saying that I married you for money."

"What?" I asked. "That's not true."

"I know," Luke said. "But they're saying that I lied on my military paperwork."

"But you didn't," I said. "We're not really married."

"I know," Luke said. "But they don't believe us."  
(Wakefield, 2017: 220)

This quote shows that Luke is being charged with fraud because he married Cassie for money. The military is saying that he lied on his military paperwork when he said that he was married. Luke knows that this is not true, but he is still being charged with fraud.

"Come on, Cass. That would be Luke's trial, not yours," Toby said.

"Right?"

"We're married. It's going to be my trial eventually, T."

Toby shook his head with a confident smile. "He's worse, though. His dealer? I mean, that's some shady shit. You could probably even spin it so he manipulated you." (Wakefield, 2017: 231)

These quotation shows how Cassie is struggling to cope with the news that Luke is going to jail. She is unable to focus on the good news that Toby is telling her about the record deal, because she is too focused on what jail will mean for Luke. She starts to think about the punishment, loneliness, and isolation that Luke will face in jail. She also thinks about how his agony will reach out to her, even though he is physically separated from her.

This quote illustrates the emotional complications that arise from Luke's impending jail sentence. Cassie is feeling a range of emotions, including sadness, fear, and anger. She is also feeling guilty, because she feels like she is somehow responsible for Luke's situation. These emotions are all compounded by the fact that Cassie is trying to maintain a positive attitude in front of her bandmates.

The emotional complication in this quote is significant because it shows how Cassie's feelings are affecting her ability to function. She is unable to focus on the good news about the record deal, and she is starting to shake. This shows that she is overwhelmed by her emotions, and that she is struggling to cope with the situation.

The emotional complication in this quote also adds to the suspense and drama of the novel. Readers are left wondering how Cassie will cope with Luke's jail sentence, and whether their relationship will be able to survive. This quote is a powerful example of how Tess Wakefields uses emotional complication to create a more engaging and emotionally resonant story.

The impact of fake marriage to the protagonists' life in Tess Wakefields' novel *Purple Hearts* can be as follows.

1. Cassie and Luke enter into a fake marriage to solve their financial problems, but their fraudulent marriage is a crime in the eyes of the U.S. military, and they face the risk of being caught. Luke is a marine who needs to pay off an old drug dealer, and he agrees to marry Cassie for the benefits.
2. Protagonist enters into the fake marriage because of financial problem. Cassie married with Luke to gain access to better medical insurance to cover her medication. The marriage allows her to access better medical insurance, which helps her to pay off her medical bills and other expenses.
3. Cassie and Luke are committing fraud on the government by pretending to be in a real marriage. When the fake marriage is discovered, They faces legal consequences which make Luke got arrested that add to Cassie's stress and anxiety.

4. Cassie and Luke both have personal struggles that they must set aside to maintain the facade of a genuine relationship. In the end, they maintained to gain transformation and growth during the novel, both also involved their feeling and change the fake marriage became a true love.

## 5. Conclusion

In *Purple Hearts* by Tess Wakefield, the fake marriage between Cassie and Luke begins as a calculated arrangement to address their respective personal struggles—Cassie's need for affordable medical insurance and Luke's financial debt. However, this seemingly simple contract spirals into a deeply complex emotional and legal entanglement. The marriage, while providing short-term financial relief, leads to significant emotional complications, particularly as genuine feelings begin to emerge between the two protagonists. Cassie's emotional vulnerability and Luke's inner conflict gradually shift the nature of their relationship from pretense to authenticity. Moreover, the legal consequences of their deceit underscore the gravity of their decision. Luke faces charges of fraud, and the repercussions extend beyond his military career to affect both his and Cassie's emotional stability. The narrative explores how the burden of maintaining a fabricated relationship—under the scrutiny of law and the pressure of personal hardship—tests their resilience and sense of self. Despite the initial dishonesty, the journey they undertake together becomes one of transformation and growth. The fake marriage, rather than being a purely self-serving act, evolves into a catalyst for emotional healing and mutual understanding. Cassie and Luke are ultimately forced to confront not only the external consequences of their actions but also their own internal emotional truths. Wakefield effectively uses the trope of a sham marriage not just as a plot device, but as a lens through which themes of survival, love, morality, and identity are explored. In the end, what begins as deception leads to authenticity, illustrating that even relationships founded on falsehood can yield real emotional depth, provided there is willingness to face the consequences and grow from them.

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