

Wuthering Heights

— Emily Bronte

Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Manjhi
Dept. of English
J. N. College, Madhubani

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Catherine

Lecture - 02

Catherine

But unlike the lower creations of nature, she has gone against the deepest law of her being. This she has transgressed by her marriage to Edgar, when all the time she knew that her closest affinities were with Heathcliff. Her motives for this union were pride and social ambition as well as a feeling of physical attraction. But compared with her basic sympathy with Heathcliff, these motives - as she admits to Nelly Dean - were insufficient. It is this violation of her integrity and of herself knowledge which constitutes her tragedy.

As stated above, Catherine represents the principle of self-love, the only escape out of which lies through complete love of another. But this she does not find with Edgar, and the violation which she inflicts upon herself converts herself of love into a force of chaos. When through her illness, this spirit of chaos and utter caprice are, in turn, constrained, there exists no remaining outlet for her energies

save is a desire for death. With its total annihilating powers death must always stand at the consummation of all chaotic forces so that we see how, in her death wish, Catherine turns the spirit of chaos back upon herself.

There is some affinity of nature between Catherine and Heathcliff, Both are primitive in certain respects, and both are creatures of stormy, uncontrollable passions. Love and hatred exist in both with an uncommon intensity. Like her lover, Catherine under a fit of temper, has little control over her passions. Owing to this temperamental affinity, Catherine regards herself as inseparably united to Heathcliff. In a scene in the novel, she tells Nelly Dean; "My great miseries in the world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning, my great thought in living is herself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and all else remained, and he were annihilated; the universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it. My love for him is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I am well aware of it as winter changes the trees, My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath; a source of little visible delight, but necessary Nelly - I am Heathcliff!"

Catherine's delirium marks a turning point in her existence. Not only does it indicate the crisis of her illness after which the currents of her life shift their direction and flow

towards death but it marks also a mental change. It serves as the symbol of a trauma the experiencing of which has led her nature wholly to reject her husband's love. Until that moment her affection for Edgar have been real though limited in scope. Physically she had found him attractive; and if there had never been any question of her sharing with him that sympathy of soul which she had enjoyed with Heathcliff Edgar's tenderness and kindness had given him no small claim upon her heart. "What you touch at present you may" she tells her husband who comes to see her during her illness, after a quarrel, "but my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again. I don't want you, Edgar, I am past wanting you." What has happened is that her love for Heathcliff buried for so long has burst to the surface again, on his reappearance. But in the trauma which is expressed by her delirium, we find few references to the grown Heathcliff. It is to the Heathcliff of her youth that her wandering mind returns. Heathcliff the boy and Heathcliff the man exist, however, together in her mind when she looks from her bed room at Thrushcross Grange; imagining that she can see the candle in her window at Wuthering Heights. The full stream of her mind has turned back towards the past. The present save

as a dimension of pain possessed no reality for her. The future holds only a sense of death.

Catherine to sum up, is Emily's excellent artistic product.