

Carol Gilligan's *The Birth of Pleasure* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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Dr. Manal Yassin Eissa
Department of English
University College for Women
Ain Shams University

Nathaniel Hawthorne's chef-d'oeuvre, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) marks an emblematic inquiry into the moral issues of a 17th Century New England community. In Hawthorne's novel, the real and the fictitious are joined together, depicting through symbolism the quandary of the American individual. The novelist explores the heritage of American Puritanism, using the story of Hester and Dimmesdale to imply the struggle between the willingness to admit one's sins and the possibility of hiding them. In consequence, *The Scarlet Letter* opens up to one's view profounder facts about 17th Century American ways of life. Therefore, Hawthorne could also display a deep psychological vision into the ambiguities of human nature. Although Hawthorne's romance sometimes causes a state of discomfort or even anger, it still produces an excited interest among many contemporary readers and critics. In point of fact, each recipient exerts his effort so as to go through the deeper layers of Hawthorne's symbolic meanings. Paradoxically, the novel's obscurity offers an incentive to manifold political and psychological readings. Thus, new meanings are often elicited from such classical works. Daniel Bruce comments on the wider connotations of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* :

Widely believed to be the font of colonial civilization and the future United States, puritanism provided the perfect milieu for a novelist, psychologist, or would-be best-selling author intrigued with paradox and ambivalence... (3)

Carol Gilligan is one of America's most eminent psychologists and writers who celebrates Hawthorne's novel in her recent psychological study, *The Birth of Pleasure* (2002). The book represents a sudden advance into the restricting puritan heritage. In this study, Gilligan writes about love in a puritanical society as well as the impediments that stand in the way of 'pleasure'. Due to this oppressive atmosphere, individuals unconsciously reiterate miserable experiences in their real life. Similarly, by the end of Hawthorne's tale, Hester willingly receives her penalty. Hopefully, Gilligan assumes that modern individuals are presently passing through the last stage of patriarchy. Because the late 20th Century has witnessed the beginning of a 'change', many restrictions between human beings are removed. For instance, the 20th Century has viewed a renewed interest in women's roles. Again, children often begin to express their misgivings about their fathers' positions of power at an early age. The development in the field of information technology has made the crucial role of fathers less significant by offering an effortless access to knowledge.

For all that, many persons rarely harmonize with the rigidly patriarchal types of their modern communities as the center around which others are collected. Speaking figuratively, Gilligan portrays patriarchy as follows:

Like trick pictures that at first glance appear to be a mass of lines and swirls, until you let your eyes go out of focus and then suddenly an image is revealed, patriarchy creates an optical illusion, focusing one's eyes in a way that makes it difficult to see its presence. To see patriarchy means to look at the world in a different way from the way we are taught to see it... (208)

Modern patriarchal societies regard the preservation of social stability and the subjugation of human conduct to law as an issue to be carefully considered. These societies do not suppose they can be safe without intentionally taking rigid procedures to

maintain their safety .Such procedures aim to direct and watch Man's behavior. As Zygmunt Bauman, a modern sociologist, has put it: **"...This is what the opposition between heteronomy and authority , control and self control , regimentation and freedom , is about ."**(10).

Nevertheless, to Gilligan, love holds the promise of getting rid of a patriarchal authority. Throughout her journey towards knowledge, Gilligan searches for different facets of love. Par excellence, love is closely interconnected with democracy since both share similar distinguished attributes. Love could provide knowledge of the fundamental values of a democratic life. Both love and democracy rely upon word utterances or spoken expressions. In spite of that, it is almost impossible to distinguish love from tragedy. It is generally assumed that the pleasure of love usually menaces the firmly established system of life. As a result, pleasure could sometimes imply a state of utter confusion or a strong source of disturbance .So, people are set in a cultural environment that distorts their pleasurable experience. Accordingly, the practice of an autocratic authority over love is **"the enemy of freedom"** or **"a public enactment of terror"**(Gilligan , 233). Gilligan goes on to speak in favor of 'pleasure' in the following assertion: **"...But there is nothing intrinsically chaotic in pleasure. It has its own rhythms and cadences ; finding and losing and finding again.It is the music of love...(233)"**. Gilligan even sets forth the distinct meaning of 'pleasure'. She adds:

Pleasure is a sensation.It is written into our bodies; it is our experience of delight , of joy....This knowing becomes a taproot , anchoring the psyche in the body, in relationship ,in language and culture .Pleasure will become a marker,a compass pointing to emotional true north.(159)

From that angle, a broader as well as a more inclusive interpretation of the term 'pleasure' is suggested by Gilligan . Pleasure stems from our inner self, allowing one's feelings to

grow stronger. It is also a responsiveness that exists into us, identifying the truth about one's being, ideas, emotional excitement, happiness or grieves. Above all, it is interesting to note that hedonic principles or mere agreeable sensations are not Gilligan's chief goals in *The Birth of Pleasure*. On the other hand, Gilligan's ideas reminisce the principal doctrines of 18th and 19th Century Utilitarianism which presuppose that 'pleasure' is an essentially superior choice to sorrow. This moral philosophy associates happiness with pleasure. The utilitarian should seek the utmost pleasure to achieve freedom as well as his inner state of balance. However, A.J.Ayer offers a reconciliatory view: **"....It follows that the right action is the one that causes or is calculated to cause at least as favorable a ratio of pleasure to pain as any other action that it would, in the circumstances, be open to the agent to undertake...."**(37).

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne juxtaposes the pleasurable experience of Hester's character with the highly estimable position of puritan women. She is shiny whereas puritan women are colorless. Hester's letter is so bright or glittering to make her look more attractive and eye-catching. Hence, Hawthorne presents a vivid picture of the letter in the second chapter of the novel: **"....On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold threads, appeared the letter A...."**(58). Hester appears at the start of the novel as an unchaste and adulterated woman. Gradually, she becomes the woman to whom other puritan wives visit to try to find solace and advice. As she stays away from the puritan frame, Hester calls into question its entire prejudiced system. By opposites, the public condemnation of Hester within her own society encourages her to overcome its system. Her dismissal from the puritan community enables her to attain a capacity of understanding some of the hidden truths of this authoritarian system. Hester's choice to be free raises her to another higher level as it reflects an action which depends on her own free will. Even Zygmunt Bauman refers to the individual's innate tendency to freedom: **"...Humans are fundamentally**

free as agents who act rather than abstain from action , or refrain from acting rather than act in a certain way....”(29).

Nevertheless , Puritanism had intrinsically been associated with oppressive and unyielding conducts. The puritans strongly believe in the supreme power of God, the absolute corruption of Man and the controlling influence of God’s mercy for regeneration or sanctification. Hawthorne’s puritans are regarded as divinely guided officials who are reluctant to condone offenders. Therefore, by the end of *The Scarlet Letter*, the novelist highlights Hester’s inability to become an absolutely ‘free’ woman after she goes through a long and patient suffering of punishment. Bauman goes on to comment on the impracticality and the costly price of freedom :

The desire for freedom comes from the experience of oppression, that is from the feeling that one can not escape doing what one would rather not do (or cannot refrain from doing it without exposing oneself to a penalty which is even more unpleasant than surrender to the original demand),... (49)

Gilligan writes about Hawthorne’s dazzling insight into Hester’s oppressed situation in the following evaluative note:

With the economy of the single letter ‘A’, he captures how the very qualities that enable a woman to free herself from the iron framework of patriarchy also disable her by causing her to be labeled an impure woman , a woman who has been adulterated.... (134)

Aware of this division within the human psyche, Gilligan examines the origin of what she calls “a pervasive trauma”(6). This trauma results from a profound emotional or psychological upheaval that causes one’s withdrawal from self or from others. For this reason, a split personality emerges which is composed of two internally dissociated attitudes. According to Carol Gilligan ,

a “trauma” was brought forth to our human history after the dismissal of Adam and Eve from heaven . Violence and tragedy passed down to their descendants ever since .Due to this emotional and psychological distress, one usually fails to comply with the surroundings. Gilligan further demonstrates this idea:

Perhaps patriarchy , by establishing hierarchy in the heart of intimacy , is inherently tragic , and like all trauma survivors , we keep telling the story we need to listen to and understand...(7)

The roots of oppression may stem from the conflict between one’s own goals and society’s opposing forces .By this tragic conflict, love is transformed into complete failure while pleasure is linked with mere illusion.

Tracing the recurring motif of ‘tragic love’ in many well-known literary works, it could be observed that the voice of “pleasure” usually fades away and a sad ending is resumed instead. One of the chief reasons that urged Gilligan to conduct her study is writers’ inability to abstain from tragic love stories. In reality, readers and audiences are inescapably overwhelmed by stories that end tragically. These renowned love stories most often involve the possibility of ruin. Love becomes overcast with shadows of loss and separation. Young couples start to meet with various limitations that restrict them by means of unchanging categories of femininity and masculinity. Henceforward, the beginnings of private love relations are always obstructed by doubts that if lovers divulge their secrets, they will renounce the closeness and warmth they continually try to find. In this way, concerns of affection and love are replaced with themes of desertion and departure.

In the light, the fascinating myth of *Psyche and Cupid* is a strong incentive to Gilligan ; it basically delineates a noticeable challenge to tragic love stories. In this tale, characters are intensely preoccupied with obeying their inner psychic stimulus that is not distorted by external pressures. Gilligan says :

In Greek, the word 'soul' is psyche; it also means 'breath' or 'life'....Whether conceived as a divine spark or as part of the natural wonder of the human being, the soul is the wellspring of our minds and our hearts, our voice and our capacity for resistance. But Psyche is also the name of the young woman in the ancient story about love. (8)

The story unfolds in *Metamorphoses*, a novel by Apuleius. The word 'metamorphoses' implies the transformation of inherited fixed patterns or categories into new meanings. Hence, "*Psyche and Cupid*" is a tale of a struggle against conventional or conservative tragic stories. Furthermore, it exhibits different forms of relation that reflect a rigidly hierarchical system; namely, subservient women, jealous girls and dominating men. Psyche and Cupid are entangled in this deeply rooted patriarchal tradition, but they try to reach at a psychologically liberal realm. However their love is doomed to remain in secrecy; it exists in a totally inequitable milieu. Like Hawthorne's Pearl, the birth of a child, named Pleasure turns to indicate a heraldic device that gives free expression to love. Moreover, the myth shows an analogy with tragic love stories in later times. For example, it affects Shakespeare's attitudes towards love together with his portrayal of female prototypes.

In Shakespeare's tragedies, characters regularly encounter strong social obstacles that hinder their freedom. The protagonists exert themselves so as to defeat these obstacles. Nonetheless, their love causes them immense hardships and difficulties. For instance, Hamlet tries to avert to place revenge over love, but he finally turns into a murderer. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare depicts the king's despair at having to live with the inevitable results of his violent and bloody acts as intrinsic political diseases of a despotic rule. Yet, Macbeth ends up as a usurper and a regicide. Romeo and Juliet move towards their tragic fatal end as inexplicably as they had previously accepted their romantic love. In *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the

noble soldiers die as memorable, honored and brave men. Like this, Shakespeare's tragedies deal almost solely with kings or princes on whose destinies depend those of the people they control. This usually culminates in the tragic death of the hero. *Othello's* final scene is another illustrative example of the hero's predestined fate:

Othello:

**Who can control his fate?'Tis not so now.
Be not afraid , though you do see me weaponed.
Here's my journey's end,here is my butt,
And very seamark of my utmost sail.
Do you go back dismayed ?'Tis a lost fear.
Man but a rush against Othello's breast,
And he retires....(Act V,Scene II,Lines263-269)**

Contra wise, in Shakespeare's comedies, happy ends take the place of catastrophic ones and romantic love prevails over public interests. And so, the final disentanglement of Shakespeare's comic plots is completely cheerful. Characters face their private and public dilemma triumphantly as they shun the evolving of tragic events. Consequently, set in distant mythical lands, Shakespeare's comedies represent the likelihood of restoring pleasurable human relations. In *The Tempest*, the final note of Miranda brings with it so much joy:

Miranda

Oh Wonder !

**How many goodly creatures are there here !
How beauteous mankind is !Oh brave new world,
That has such people in it !(Act 5,Scene 1,Line 182)**

In this way, Gilligan's entire work functions as "a chart of love"(Gilligan , 4) where she places ancient classical tales against her psychological background. In this "map"(Gilligan ,3), she delineates old images of love in detail. Moreover, she pleads in

favor of further steps to liberate the two sexes from various impediments that have restricted their aptitude for getting 'pleasure' from life. Gilligan also warns against the lack of a new "framework" (passim) within which individuals can think, behave and act freely. As she lives outside the ancient Puritan institution, Hester Prynne calls into question its whole prejudiced system as well as its guiding doctrines in men/women relationships. The crisis of Hester lies in her incapability to live within this older system of the Puritan society.

Therefore, a shared system of puritan symbols exists which is mainly predestined by puritan control. Nancy Glasby writes of Hawthorne's exposition of Puritan symbols :

The scarlet alpha begins as a univocal comment imposed on Hester by Puritan society . It is transformed through the significant actions of the characters into a living hieroglyphic denoting the reconciliation of opposites . The word made flesh . (*Being True: Logos in The Scarlet Letter* , 1)

The fictional idealistic incentive transforms these symbols into actions. Similarly, Hawthorne follows the same course of trying to discover reality through acts. For reasons given , characters' journey from ignorance to self revelation transforms words into objects . When Hester and Dimmesdale seek to arrive at the truth about themselves , they are regularly controlled by "logos" (1) as Glasby indicates . Their journey metamorphoses mere abstract "logos" into real substances . Glasby adds :

Reality is polarized : light / dark , man / woman, present / absent ,and in each case one of the pair is privileged . The ego seeks to identify itself with the valorized element and to suppress the devalued side....(2)

Hawthorne concentrates upon these pictorial representations, which continue to spread out an air of mystery. Language itself

acquires a devalued role as it functions as an oratory to hide truth. Hester's letter signifies a mystifying enigma that perplexes its onlooker. Ipso facto, the letter embodies a non-existent image that violates all logical explanations and spellbinds its viewer. Samuel Coale develops the same notion of the overriding power of visual icons:

Hawthorne seems to be fascinated by a kind of psychology of idolatry , in which these icons come to possess the observers who stumble upon them in an almost demonic fashion.... (" *The Scarlet Letter As Icon*" , 6)

Gilligan's intelligent reading into Hawthorne's symbolic icons and her creation of new models of female emotional responses have had a remarkable influence on the field of psychology along with literature.

The idea of women's capability to penetrate deep into long-established or conservative archetypes is very close to our present-day culture. Hawthorne's concerns in *The Scarlet Letter* tend to reverberate in our present time. With this view of the tension between characters and their environment, Hawthorne was stressing the crisis of his age – a situation that 21st Century American literature takes over. In this respect , Gilligan is earnestly attracted to feminist issues that elevate Pearl to a freer level, germane to the 21st Century model . Her knowledge of the basic facts of *The Birth of Pleasure* is often drawn from the Abolitionist Feminist and the 20th Century Liberation Movement. To her, "**The Abolitionist Feminists of the nineteenth century sought to free love from the constraints of racism and patriarchy....**"(161). These revolutionary movements offer Gilligan a wider range of perception and experience in the relation between love and patriarchy . Like the Abolitionists , she tries to 'abolish' or eliminate the unbending hierarchical division of ruling organizations that conceals Man's inner or truthful human feelings . In brief , Gilligan has planned to introduce an advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality

between the two sexes . In consequence, people who have shunned Hester come to see the marvelous letter she puts on her breast as a token of strength and love. The novel reads :

...,people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and besought her counsel , as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble....She assured them, too, of her firm belief , that ,at some brighter period, when the world should grow ripe for it in heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness (260-61)

Gilligan presumes that the essential interests of authority and the people are eternally antithetical. It follows that, she thinks of dramatizing this theme of obstinate defiance of authority-a rather critical case to handle. This is eventually the vivid picture that is drawn by Gilligan and produced by Shakespeare and Co.. In other words, *The Birth of Pleasure* inspires a new stage adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*, it attempts to impart something of the spirit of the novel's puritan time. Hence, she changed the 1850 classic into a dramatic form on November 2002. As a consequence , Gilligan's book brings forth a rich stage variant of a large scope that says something about the diverse facets of American life at the beginning of the Century. Larry Parnass declares: " **It is an auspicious background for someone who would bring Hester Prynne to contemporary audience....**"(2). Ergo, Gilligan calls to mind the virtually important political role of theater. Among the principal tasks of theater is the determination of one's rights according to rules of equality. However, Mc Grath lists other functions of theater:

One: theater, of all the arts, surely works at the interface between the creative and the political, calling together audiences of citizens to contemplate their society or its ways . And two: the theater can only renew itself for audiences

**and for theater-makers if it is part of the times
it lives in....("Theater & Democracy" 137-38)**

The Adaptation harks back to the unyielding Puritan constraints as distinctive standards for the 21st Century; it also examines the sorrowful emotions that are caused by guilt. Hester's public humiliating disgrace results in her exclusion from general social acceptance. She is doomed to wear an 'A' letter as an act of self-abasement for her guilt. Wren Celia writes of this analogy between Gilligan's study and Hawthorne's novel:

So, it is not surprising, that when celebrated psychologist and feminist Carol Gilligan embarked on her new book, *The Birth of Pleasure* – a study of our fascination with love -means - suffering sagas - she made Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 classic...well exhibit A(*A Study In Scarlet*, 1)

Although Gilligan is ingeniously devoted to the original piece, she has abundantly dealt with details that add to the performance. In the novel, Hester seems to pursue a secret course while on stage; she requires other tools to persuade us that her feelings are more genuine. The diverse elements of Hester's portrait collect gradually in the novel to generate one of the most memorable female characters in American literature. However; this same portrait appears to be too fully-fledged in Gilligan's account. Again, in order to convey an updated version of Hawthorne's novel, Shakespeare's company has brought about a major modification in Pearl's character. The company has chosen a young woman as an actress for Pearl's role so as she could tell the audience about the joys and liberties she met in her life. Besides, in the new version, Pearl and Hester appear to be more emancipated as if they had been rescued from punishment. Parnass speaks appreciatively of the new treatment of *The Scarlet Letter*: "Gilligan's choices at the end make her own 21st Century voice the one that is in our heads as we leave the

theater. I understand the pleasures she takes in that, but it hobbles her foray into playwrighting.”(3).

It is the aim of this study to reconsider the values by which human beings are praised or penalized. Individuals have to better their awareness of the notions that become involved into their judgments on these issues. Basic concepts of freedom require more thorough revision and re-assessment. Herbert Morris supports this inquisitive attitude : “There are periods when a whole society’s attitude toward responsibility is uncertain and unchanging, when issues of praise and blame ,reward , and punishment ,are being reflected upon anew ,...”(III). Morris applies his views on contemporary societies : “ Ours is a period like this...”(III). Seen in this light, Gilligan could arrive at the conclusion that despite many progressive steps in our contemporary society, inflexible models and assumptions are still linked with our 21st Century intellectual and moral faculties, forming a limiting system of obstacles to progress and pleasure. Again , A .J .Ayer observes the presence of this same concept of social constraint in our modern societies : “... Only too often our freedom of action is restricted by the opposition of other persons , the hostility of our physical environment , or some lack of capacity , whether physical or mental in ourselves”(5).

Meanwhile, Gilligan probes into the psychology of different human types in the same way that a literary writer probes into his character’s human nature. It is noteworthy to say that Gilligan lacks specialized writing techniques since her ideas do not tightly knit together . She shifts abruptly from real to unreal levels, stimulating her readers to refer to previous details. However, her study has an intelligently and challengingly intellectual content that elicits competitive thinking. Carol Binkowski provides an overall evaluation of Gilligan’s work:

As a whole , the book is thought-provoking but also occasionally confusing . But it remains essential reading because it brings many gender,

feminist ,cultural ,and social concerns to the surface ;... (“*The Birth of Pleasure [Book]*” , 2)

In conclusion, notions of American culture have constantly appealed to writers and psychologists alike. It follows that an exchange of ideas is carried out between various groups. Perhaps this wide difference of opinions implies that the debate concerning American culture is pulsating with vigor and creativity; it mirrors urgently needed “**oppositional paradigms**” as J. R. Bush and K. Harold manifest (“*Structural America, The Persistence of Oppositional Paradigms in American Literary Theory*”, 1). They add:

An oppositional version of American culture has been common not just among poets , critics , and theorists , including . Whitman in the late nineteenth century :severe oppositional discourse continues today as perhaps the most striking feature of various modes of popular media and entertainment , ... (2)

In *The Birth of Pleasure*, Carol Gilligan nurtures a public sphere in which readers can dispute critical questions that impinge on American life. Gilligan’s re-reading of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* covers themes from patriarchy, puritanism and religion to love, democracy and pleasure. It seems that Hawthorne’s symbols remain problematic and mysterious as they continue to put forth some kind of influence over contemporary authors. What persists in the new version is the enigmatic and mystifying nature of sin and redemption.

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CAROL GILLIGAN'S *THE BIRTH OF PLEASURE*
AND
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S *THE SCARLET LETTER*

DR MANAL YASSIN EISSA
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE FOR WOMEN
AIN SHAMS UNIVERSITY

Abstract

With his notion of the struggle between men and women , oppression and love , Hawthorne was focusing upon the crisis of his age-a situation that in Gilligan's own viewpoint , 21st century American theater take over . The renowned psychologist,Carol Gilligan based her stage adaptation of Hawthorne's novel upon her new book , *The Birth of Pleasure* (May , 2002) ; she changed this 1850 classic into a dramatic form on November , 2002 .Gilligan's book examines various aspects of passion , pleasure as well as factors that are involved in them . The book evokes obsessive devotion to a capitalist life, particularly , Gilligan's own American life . It brings forth a rich stage variant of a large scope that says something about the diverse facets of American life at the beginning of the century . Gilligan's adaptation of Hawthorne's novel calls to mind again those severe social constraints as standards for the 90s . It is as if Hawthorne's symbols remain problematic and mysterious ; they continue to send forth some kind of influence over contemporary authors . What persists in Gilligan's new version is the enigmatic nature of concepts of 'sin' and 'redemption'.

As such , my paper seeks to focus on Gilligan's views in *The Birth of Pleasure* which inspires a new stage adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* . The study further demonstrates the advantages of shifting the novel to stage performance .

ملخص لبحث بعنوان الحرف القرمزي لهوثورن و مولد السرور لجيليجان

للباحثة د. منال يامين عيسى
مدرس الأدب الإنجليزي
كلية البنات
جامعة عين شمس

يعالج البحث الجوانب المختلفة للمشاعر الأنسانية و العوامل المؤثرة بها من خلال
إعادة قراءة كارول جيليجان لرواية ناتانيل هوثورن *الحرف القرمزي* عام ١٨٥٠
و ذلك في درستها السيكولوجية والتي تحمل عنوان *مولد السرور* عام ٢٠٠٢
و يتناول البحث أيضا آراء جيليجان عن تبعية الفرد لسيطرة السلطة المستبدة
و تتمثل هذه السلطة في تقييد حرية الإنسان في التعبير عن أفكاره و مشاعره .
كما تتناول الدراسة أيضا نص جيليجان المسرحي و الذي لستهتمته من رواية
هوثورن و الذي يحمل نفس الاسم و يعرض النص للأوجه المتعددة للحياة الأمريكية
مما اعتبرته عالمة النفس الشهيرة من أهم الأفكار التي يمكن تناولها في الوقت الحالي
و بذلك تظل أفكار هوثورن مصدر لستهمام للعديد من الكتاب في العصر الحديث .