

The Empowering Representation of The Gay Character in Emily Giffin's Heart of The Matter

التمثيل القوي للشخصية المثلية في رواية إميلي غيفين "جوهر المسألة"

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Abstract

In the past few decades, homosexuality has emerged as a significant social issue in the West in general and American society in particular. Its status and perception have witnessed a profound change as it has undergone a substantial shift in attitudes toward homosexuals and remarkable progress in the recognition of their rights. In addition, the increased visibility achieved through the positive and diverse representations of the queer community in educational curricula, media, and mainly literature helped challenge biases and stereotypes and promote acceptance. Emily Giffin's empowering representation and portrait of the gay character, Jason, in her novel Heart of The Matter expresses her adherence to the campaign of fighting stereotypes and promoting an appealing image of homosexuality to her readership. This article aims to probe into the author's endeavor to humanize the gay character in her novel.

Keywords : Gay, Masculinity, Queer Identity, Emily Giffin.

الملخص: على مدار العقود القليلة الماضية، برزت المثلية الجنسية كقضية اجتماعية مهمة في الغرب بشكل عام وفي المجتمع الأمريكي بشكل خاص. شهدت مكانتها وإدراكها تغييرات عميقة، حيث شهدت تحولاً ملحوظاً في المواقف تجاه المثليين وتقدماً ملحوظاً في الاعتراف بحقوقهم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ساهمت الزيادة

في الظهور من خلال التمثيلات الإيجابية والمتنوعة لمجتمع المثليين في المناهج التعليمية ووسائل الإعلام، وخاصة الأدب، في تحدي التحيزات والأنماط النمطية وتعزيز القبول. يمثل تصوير إميلي غيفين القوي للشخصية المثلية، جايسون، في روايتها "جواهر المسألة" التزامها بمحاربة الأنماط النمطية وتعزيز الصورة الجذابة للمثلية الجنسية لجمهور القراء. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى استكشاف جهود الكاتبة لتأمين إنسانية الشخصية المثلية في روايتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مثلي، ذكورة، الهوية المثلية، إميلي غيفين

1.Introduction:

Many observers of Western societies have been stunned by the extent of the decadence of the family with the prevalence of homosexuality, which not so long ago was considered an alien phenomenon that represented a threat to the stability of the family and its function as a basic structure of society. With the turn of the century, many scholars no longer understood the secret behind the unconditional and endless support for homosexuality at all levels and in all areas of life. All agreed to remove all obstacles and barriers that stand in the way of the promotion and imposition of homosexuality in all areas of the daily life of Americans, and to harness all human, intellectual, material, and lobbying resources to end all forms of harassment, discrimination, and prejudice against homosexuals. Despite the media and legal arsenal behind the gay movement, the movie industry and especially literary production, as a soft power, enables this ideology to penetrate society in a seamless way into the collective consciousness, and therefore solidify these ideas to be accepted in the name of tolerance, human rights, and individual liberties. Behind the scene, the theorists are backing up this movement with evidence that gays must be fully attributed to their civil rights.

In his book *War over The Family*, published in 2005, the American Sociologist David Popenoe realized the disastrous and chaotic state of the American family, and shed light on the severe crisis it was going through during the current century. The book's title reflects the chaos looming over the American family that he foresaw a decade earlier when he raised the alarm with some of his fellow sociologists through the report he submitted to the nation. Through this scientifically based report which he

included in the last part of his book entitled *Promises to Keep Decline and Renewal of Marriage in America*, he sought to draw the attention of the policymakers in the White House and Congress as well as the major actors in society to the dire consequences for the future of the American family if the situation is not assessed objectively and impartially, and the necessary measures are not taken to address the chaos with a clearly defined strategy to confront the tidal wave of homosexuality, especially with the advocacy of same-sex marriage and gays' rights to adopt children. He shared, like many of his colleagues and American conservative citizens, a feeling of pessimism about the future of the American family, and a fear of the alarming implications of family breakdown due to the dramatic transformation of its nature and function. He stressed the present-day state of the institution of marriage which he describes as being “under assault in our society in decline and even disrepute.”¹

This resulted from the radical and irrational opposition and rejection of the traditional family structure based on the biological and psychological differences between the sexes, and their different social gender roles. Many conservative and religious Americans felt helpless in front of the accelerated pace of empowerment of homosexuality and its decriminalization during the early years of the current millennium.

American literature, especially the novel, has accompanied this change and was considered a major tool in the process of empowering homosexuality. The position of American novelists towards this phenomenon varied between those who rejected the chaos and ambiguity that surrounded the status of the nuclear family and its sanctity, and those who were fierce defenders of gay people and their rights, and expressed their sense of belonging and pride in their homosexuality. These gay novelists delved into the experiences of gay characters and reflected their inner turmoil and suffering due to the lack of acceptance and understanding of their families, especially their parents, on the one hand, and the discrimination and contempt that may amount to verbal and physical violence against them on the other hand.

The rest of the novelists held a favorable stance to avoid swimming against the current of supporting homosexuality, which became overwhelming for anyone who disagreed with it as a result of the massive

and unrivaled support it obtained. Neither did they express their rejection of it for fear of the reaction of militants in the LGBTQ+2 rights movement and the consequences, especially on their literary careers, nor did they openly embrace these ideas. However, this group adhered to the campaign of promoting homosexuality and contributed to reducing the intensity of hatred towards homosexuals in society, urging people to accept it. They agreed on the need to promote and support homosexuality, each in their own way. They devoted their literary productions to serve this purpose to achieve success and survive the encroachment of homophobic advocates of the LGBTQ+ community as they realized the extent of the influence the latter has come to enjoy amid the affluent Corporate and media owners.

Emily Giffin belongs to the last category of American novelists. She neither embraces the queer identity nor rejects or criticizes it in her writings. She is married to a corporate executive and has twins. They all form the typical traditional American nuclear family. There is no gay character among the protagonists of her novels; however, the narrative might include a gay character that is close to the protagonist and focuses on his interaction with the rest of the characters. Emily Giffin does not show any negative attitude towards homosexuality.

On the contrary, she shows much sympathy for it as an expression of the importance of accepting this character in the family and social environment. She has witnessed the shift in attitudes towards homosexuals and has lived through the evolution of homosexuality and its depiction and treatment in current-century novels. She sympathizes with such characters by fighting against stereotypes that have been attached to gay people for a long time. So she deals positively with them. It shows them as ordinary individuals who spontaneously coexist with their family members and social environment.

The choice of this novel aims to look at the perception of the gay character and its portrayal in American literature in the first two decades of the current century. It seeks to highlight the change in the stereotypical image of homosexuals that has become entrenched in the collective consciousness of American society that has plagued it for decades. In addition, it endeavors to show the light side of the homosexual character to make it more acceptable among people. What sets the author apart is that she is a lawyer. Therefore, she is aware of the need for change of the legal

system which is now fully supportive of the protection of homosexuals from discrimination and hate laws, and enabling them to realize their civil rights. Although all of her novels are about human relationships between friends and couples and even siblings, there is not a single main lesbian character in her novels.

The novel under study is about the effects of infidelity on the family and the marital relationship itself. Nick, a surgeon and Tessa's husband is having an affair with the mother of one of his patients, Six-year-old Charlie who was severely injured to his body during a party. Charlie is an illegitimate child as his father ran away leaving his pregnant mistress Valerie facing her fate as a single mother raising her son on her own. In addition, Valerie's parents are divorced, and her relationship with her mother has always been deteriorating. The space given to Jason's character in the novel, as Valerie's brother and only support, enables the writer to contribute to the empowerment of homosexuality through the portrayal of the gay character Jason that emphasizes the positive qualities that make him a normal person with the ability to coexist with others and integrate into his family and society as a whole.

The main objective of what follows is to analyze Emily Giffin's homophobic outlook and her strategy in portraying the human dimension of the gay character and his ability to integrate into society and adapt to the requirements of social life through Jason's portrait in her novel. It emphasizes the essential role of literary production in general and the American novel in particular in the struggle against homosexual stereotypes and the rejection of outdated beliefs that led to the neutralization and marginalization of homosexuals and the diminishing of their role in society as a danger to the family and a reason for the deterioration of its vital function, which leads to the collapse of society as a whole.

2. A Civilizational Shift of Homosexuality in Western Thought:

The issue of homosexuality has been regarded by the West as one of its civilizational secretions during the last few decades to establish it as a natural model in human life and seeks to globalize it through international institutions, ignoring the strife these perverted ideas and practices can lead to. International institutions and associations supporting

homosexuality have undergone a relentless pursuit to alter it into other terms that do not carry any value, moral, or even medical connotations rejecting it. There has been a profound shift in the perception of homosexuality in the West in general and the United States of America in particular since the 1960s. It knew the beginning of the path of legalizing homosexuality and decriminalizing it despite some attempts of sagacious people to stress its perils. Its supporters took advantage of their increasing power to impose its decriminalization by enacting anti-discrimination laws against homosexuals, as happened in Northern Ireland. The latter was subject to strong pressure from the European Court of Human Rights, which condemned Northern Ireland's criminalization of same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults. The following year, Ireland joined the ranks of other countries and backed down from the criminalization of homosexuality.

World countries gradually surrendered to the pressure and started granting homosexuals more rights and protecting them from any form of segregation. The United States was no exception. The ongoing efforts of the LGBTQ+ community to take advantage of all the means available to voice their ideas and claims contributed to shaping a public discourse that challenged discrimination, marginalization, and prejudice, which would lead to further advancement of the tolerance of homosexuality within American society.

Homosexuality has been regarded for a long time as a form of perversion and a clear deviation from the instinct an individual is created with, and a disruption of the main function for which man was created, which is reproduction through legal and legitimate mating. Western thinkers felt concerned about its danger and violation of natural instincts. Therefore, regulating deviant sexuality such as homosexuality was the main concern in an increasingly modern secular Western society to avoid the transgression of the moral code which might represent a serious threat to the well-being and integrity of the family and the stability of society as well. According to Nicholas C. Edsall, the attempt to draw a clear line between acceptable behavior and deviant behavior led to the establishment of a homosexual subculture.

‘The more clearly the line was drawn, the more emphatically the homosexual or any other subculture was labeled as different and distinct,

and the more likely it was that such a subculture would develop a group consciousness, a sense of its own separateness and identity. To the extent that members of such a subculture internalized the stigmas applied to them by society, regarding themselves as in some measure criminal or sick or sinful, they represented no great threat. But group consciousness could lead as well to a sense of solidarity within the subculture, of grievance against the society that stigmatized it, and finally to the desire to redefine and assert itself on its own terms”.³

Walt Whitman, a pioneer in defense of homosexuality, contributed to providing a positive perception of homosexuality. In his attempt to differentiate the American homosexual subculture from its European counterpart characterized by effeminacy, he portrayed a new vision of a strong and masculine ideal of sexuality that he gave a significant term, comradeship. The latter was "fresh and uncomplicated, almost innocent, joyful in its celebration of the senses, potentially heroic."⁴ Whitman's endless endeavor to put forward the American perception of homosexuality pushed him to carry on the fight against the stigma of sinfulness and unnaturalness permanently associated with the forms of deviant sexuality. His revolutionary idea of "The brotherhood of lovers" revealed his efforts to promote an appealing image of homosexuals to society, "free of guilt, shame, doubt, furtiveness; it required no antecedents, no historical precedents or models; it knew neither class nor social status; it was essentially American, only possible in a democracy and the highest expression of democracy."⁵ Moreover, Whitman's genuine idea of comradeship revolutionized the Western thought of homosexuality as a deviant form of sexuality and brought a new sense to it that would shift it to new horizons. It became a source of inspiration for the movements of liberation throughout the following generations and had a significant undeniable impact on the future of homosexuality.

The promising future of comradeship initiated by Whitman began to prevail during the first decades of the twentieth century as many scholars willingly construed a more positive definition of the homosexual subculture and strived to distance it from the unreservedly averse definition, and irretrievably bury the old assumptions that dominated the early nineteenth century. The attempt of some scholars to take the Greek ideal of

sexuality as a paradigm proved incongruous with the reality of post-First World War which pushed them to revisit their sexuality and make it in accordance with contemporary times. One aspect of change brought about by the First World War was the rejection of the traditional view of masculinity which put an end to the Unitarian tradition that took the Greek as a model for homoeroticism. Being exceedingly soft, effeminate, and overemotional, this model was loathed by the postwar generation. Those who were inspired by the Unitarian tradition were outraged by the view of society that failed to perceive the significance of the romantic feature of men's camaraderie and constantly tended to stress the sexual aspect of those relationships by placing sex at its center.

Furthermore, the legalization of homosexuality was paved with campaigns that raised slogans of women's liberation and equality with men in all rights, including sexual rights. The spread of homosexuality in the world was preceded by the declaration of war on the family by diluting its concept and promoting the concept of "gender". The latter brought a new perception of femininity and masculinity that became separate from the psychological structure and social roles of individuals. The new perception of gender roles differs from the old one in the fact that they are acquired socially, and not connected to the biological and physiological nature of both sexes. The firm conviction of the family supporters about the supremacy and legacy of the heterosexual nuclear family over all the remaining forms of family was challenged after the Stonewall events which many consider as the turning point in the activism of the queer people.

The Stonewall events contributed to the culmination of the struggle and sacrifices made by the LGBTQ+ movement throughout the post-World War II years, marking a radical shift in the movement's strategy. These events were influenced by the civil rights and anti-racism movements. The bloody events pushed the movement's leaders to increase their pressure on the political class and governments by coordinating the efforts of all participants in the struggle to demand LGBTQ+ rights. The contribution of intellectuals and the elite was important and effective, like their predecessors, through a huge amount of intellectual and literary works, in addition to artistic works such as songs, films, and plays that helped frame public opinion and influence it to reduce prejudice and hatred against homosexuals, and to promote more tolerance and acceptance.

The elite of society has become the primary supporter of the LGBTQ movement in pressuring the government to enable individuals to exercise their civil rights, especially the right for two consenting adults to engage in a same-sex relationship. The violent events at Stonewall have motivated the LGBTQ movement and all its subcultures to continue advancing in their struggle to liberate themselves from all the social, moral, and even legal constraints imposed on them. Their sense of empowerment and belief in their active and influential role in advanced global society continues to deepen. The LGBTQ+ movement, regardless of its various subcultures, has successfully resisted hatred, prejudice, and intolerance within American society, and consolidated the necessity of activism and militantism to transmit it from one generation to another. The success of the civil rights movement and the feminist movement amplified their enthusiasm and determination to achieve its end.

2.2 The Twenty-First Century Journey of Transformation of Homosexuality from Stigma to Acceptance in the U.S

Since the mid-nineties of the last century, western society has shifted towards a fierce defense of homosexuality and the call for its normalization. The motive behind this was not merely sexual lust, but rather the philosophical dimension of the principle of pleasure. The current position of homosexuality seems a logical result and the only faithful translation of the utilitarian principle of pleasure. The optimism in the ability of a homosexual person to establish a relationship with another person of the same sex, overcome his alienation temporarily, and then return to his simple life of consumption has become more likely nowadays. The call for its normalization does not represent a call for tolerance or understanding. Rather, it is another attempt to abolish a basic human dichotomy, the male/female dichotomy on which normative humanity is based.

The status of homosexuality has undergone a significant shift in attitudes towards homosexuals since the beginning of the current century which saw remarkable progress in the recognition and affirmation of their rights. The process of its legalization and decriminalization was accelerated in response to the rising pressure of activists and the Human Rights Organization whose campaign has been instrumental in challenging discrimination and advocating legal and societal equality. To achieve this

goal, legislators enacted anti-discrimination laws against homosexuals and imposed equal age of consent between sexual relations and heterosexual relations. In addition, the increased visibility achieved through the positive and diverse representations of the queer community in educational curricula and the media, and mainly literary production helped challenge biases and stereotypes and promote acceptance.

There has been a vigorous race to sustain homosexuality through the establishment of associations to support homosexuals obtain their full rights equally with the rest of society, and enact an arsenal of laws to facilitate their integration into society. Influential figures from the political class and thinkers, prominent literary figures as well as celebrities of art, culture, and sports, rushed to support gay male sexuality and the rights of gays, by revealing their homosexuality and being proud of it, and urging others to follow their example. However, those who were non-gays showed their sympathy and support for gays and encouraged them to move forward in their struggle to obtain their full rights.

As far as US politics is concerned, Barack Obama was the first American president to mention the word "gay" and the issue of gay rights for the first time in his inaugural address. He was also the first US president to announce his support for same-sex marriage on May 9, 2012. In addition, the White House held a closed meeting, which was the first bisexual event hosted by the White House, with approximately thirty intersex activists so they could meet with government officials and discuss issues of particular concern to the intersex community on the day of the Intersex Awareness Day celebration. An illustrative example of the influence of the LGBTQ+ Community and those behind it is Hillary Clinton's remarkable presence at the Pride Parade, as the first woman in the White House to participate in this type of demonstration. The change in the view of the American society towards the phenomenon of homosexuality and its acceptance reflected positively on the position of homosexuals in society, as many of them assumed high and prestigious political positions in the administration and were able to access key sectors such as the judiciary, Congress and even the army, and assumed the highest ranks.

There is no doubt nowadays that the barriers, impenetrable to the rise of homosexuals in positions of responsibility, which enabled them to intensify their influence in all areas of life were removed, supported by the

activities and spectra of civil society, thus accelerating the process of legalizing and legitimizing homosexuality and gay rights. Gays have gained civil and political rights, they have the right to run for Congress and even presidential elections, and Congress has become composed of many gay members in both parties. Allowing homosexuals to hold marriage ceremonies in public was an indication of the entry into force of same-sex marriage laws, which was extended to the acquisition of the rights for the adoption of children by same-sex couples and the legal recognition of unspecified gender. All this was a token of homosexuals' enjoyment of their civil rights, which in turn increased their desire and aspiration for more rights to the extent of repealing the ban imposed on gays serving in the army. Amazingly, the US Military Academy witnessed the first same-sex marriage between a young lieutenant and her partner in the Old Cadet Chapel at West Point Cemetery. The arsenal of laws enacted to empower homosexuals did not prevent them from social discrimination and guarantee them social acceptance. Therefore, the anti-discrimination laws against homosexuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity helped increase their protection and paved the way for their gradual integration, diminishing anti-homosexual sentiment in the public and private sectors as well as in society.

Sport has also been used as a means to promote the tolerance of homosexuality and make it socially approved. It has moved from supporting gender equality, through women's involvement in sports that they would not have been able to practice, to supporting gays. The blatant proof is the support that gays have received from the English Premier League for years. The latter has shown, over the past few years, support for gay players from the twenty clubs in the competition whose leaders symbolically wore a colored armband in support of LGBT people. This support has constantly increased recently by devoting the 13th and 14th rounds of the English Premier League to show support for homosexuality. Even though pro-homosexuals sentiment spread to all fields of the American life and society, the magic of literature to adjust collective ideas and perceptions about a given issue such as homosexuality has proved highly inevitable in the course of the queer community activism.

3. The Quest for Queer Acceptance through Challenging Stereotypes :

As literature mirrors society and provides a truthful depiction of social reality, it has been a central tool through its different genres in pushing forward the activism of queer people for acceptance. Authors play an important role in portraying authentically the condition of queer individuals and contribute to their integration into society. The literary works have enhanced the visibility of the queer community through the presence of queer characters by offering an insight into their experiences, struggles, and challenges. The literary representation of gay characters increased their visibility in the American society and led to the normalization of the queer identity and its acceptance. The efforts made by authors to fight segregation and marginalization of queer people raised people's awareness about the prejudice and bias perpetuated by stereotypes. Their strategy has been to provide a positive portrayal of queer characters who are depicted as resilient, proud, and capable of finding love, happiness, and fulfillment in their lives. Their main purpose has been centered on the empowerment of those people by depicting their struggle against various forms of discrimination and marginalization. By opting for an empowering portrayal of queer characters as fully developed individuals, authors humanize them by portraying them as ordinary individuals with hopes, dreams, and complexities and therefore foster empathy towards them among the readers.

Twenty-first-century American literary men in general and novelists in particular have contributed through the literary representation of queer characters to a growing awareness and acceptance of their identities and experiences within the American society. American novelists often sew the threads of more nuanced and diverse narratives by exploring the complexities of various cultural, familial, and social contexts queer characters are involved in, and acknowledging how their experiences can vary significantly for different members of the queer community. These portrayals often explore themes of acceptance, rejection, love, loss, and resilience, challenging stereotypes and presenting queer relationships as valid and meaningful, and advocating for social justice and equality.

Literary figures, including male gay writers, have tried tackling the issue of homosexuality concerning the nuclear family and its form,

stability, and well-being. Due to the rapid spread of this phenomenon, many young boys and adolescents became homosexuals and therefore went through a psychologically complicated process toward self-definition because they are afraid of their parents' reaction if they declare their homosexuality. Generally, the character finds himself caught in an embarrassing situation torn between his relationship with his family especially his father, and his sexual orientation. The American society witnessed a shift in the parents' treatment of their children's sexuality. They shifted from managing to help their children treat their homosexuality to being tolerant and accepting their children's homosexuality.

Emily Giffin's *Heart of the Matter* is one of those twenty-first-century novels which engages with the real-world struggles of gay characters and highlights the importance of supportive relationships in queer individuals lives. Like many contemporary American novels, *Heart of the Matter* depicts the character of Jason, the queer characters' quest for normal and natural relationships with family members, friends, coworkers, romantic partners, and society as a whole. It embodies the spirit of the age which is the positive portrayal of queer individuals stressing their need for constant progress and broader representation in media and popular culture to eradicate the stigma and discrimination they face, and allow a greater mainstream visibility to their experience.

The writer's clear interest in the struggle of LGBTQ individuals to gain their rights and acceptance in American society is evident. Her involvement in the effort to integrate LGBTQ individuals into society and portray them as ordinary people who are no different from the rest of society is reflected through the character of Jason. Although this character is not central in the novel, the relationship he shares with his sister Valerie, who is considered one of the main characters in the novel, serves as a conduit for the author to depict the gay character as a normal individual living a normal life in every sense of the word and finding acceptance within his familial and societal surroundings. One of the key aspects the writer focused on to achieve this goal is the comparison between Valerie's strained relationship with her mother versus her strong and supportive relationship with her brother.

3.1 The Gay Character and Familial Bonds:

As one of the narrators in the novel, she provides the reader with everything related to her twin brother's character. Unlike what is commonly known, Jason serves as the real support for Valerie, standing by her in the difficult circumstances she faced, bringing up her illegitimate child from her lover, and the painful incident that happened to her son Charlie. In the sixth chapter, Valerie recounts the details of her routine at the hospital with her son, who suffered a serious accident during a party that led to his body being burned, and the physical exhaustion that affected her as she spent sleepless nights next to her son to the point that night and day became blurred the curtains are kept closed to block out the sunlight. In addition, she is stressed due to her worry about her son's health and future. In these difficult times, just remembering her brother's joke at the funeral of her mother's second husband is enough to momentarily make her forget her sadness and fear for her son.

The author aims to create a strong portrait of Jason's character, portraying him as a natural and spontaneous person in his interactions with others. A prime example of this is his sister turning to memories with him to escape her sorrow, praising his ability to make her laugh in the darkest circumstances, as is the case in her current ordeal, where he always tries to bring a smile to her face and reassure her by standing by her in this harsh and difficult situation, leading her to recall childhood memories with her brother and the pranks they used to play each time she needed his support during her life stages, especially after her lover's departure and all the challenges she went through after her pregnancy.

In contrast, the author shows us the nature of the relationship between Valerie and her mother Rosemary. Valerie tells us about her mother's flaws such as her inability to control what she says and be considerate of her daughter's special circumstances. Despite Jason's attempt to tell her what to say and not to say before meeting her daughter and grandson in the hospital, Rosemary remains true to her habit and does not hesitate to comment on eating in the hospital cafeteria when meeting Valerie. Consequently, Valerie's feeling of fatigue even before she starts talking to her mother is easily noticed and propitiously depicted by the writer. This feeling leads Valerie to draw a comparison between her brother and her mother.

Valerie accepts and endures every word from her brother whom she does not outnumber the few times he has upset her. On the contrary, her relationship with her mother is cold and distant. A truth that Jason can notice from the way they hug each other. This scene catches Jason's attention and makes him wonder why two people like his mother and sister cannot express their love for each other. Valerie feels a kind of envy towards her brother as she remembers the first time he brought his lover to the house to meet the family, and her sensation of seeing them expressing their affection and feelings by touching, holding hands, and hugging each other. She expresses her admiration for her brother's ability to show natural tenderness easily and spontaneously. She remembers her mother's reaction to this allegedly unnatural relationship, and her attempts to deny her son's homosexuality. Her mother ends up accepting it calmly.

This pushes Valerie to compare her mother's current reaction to the time when Valerie told her she was pregnant. Rosemary's reaction suggested a change in the parents' perception of their children's homosexuality. They tend to tolerate much more than their daughters' pregnancy out of wedlock. For instance, nothing changes Valerie's mother's feelings towards Jason after learning about his homosexuality, whereas Valerie is afraid of her mother's reaction to Charlie's injury. Finally, Valerie also recognizes that accepting a person as they are is part of love. In fact, this is the author's strategy to show homosexuality as a normal thing and gay people as ordinary people like the rest of society, and how they are nowadays accepted by their family and social surroundings after they used to be ostracized and subjected to all forms of marginalization and discrimination because of their sexual orientation.

Valerie finally admits that Jason is Rosemary's favorite son. She concludes that despite his homosexuality, her mother shows great concern and fear for him and his health. For instance, when she sees him in the hospital, she finds him pale and thin. Immediately, she suspects he caught AIDS, but he quickly reassures her that he is fine and has no health issues. Her reaction brings us to contrast the former position of homosexuality which used to be regarded as a major cause of infection with many deadly sexual diseases. George Mosse brilliantly articulates this idea when he states that 'Stereotypes, however, can be eroded at the same speed

with which society itself produces or seems to tolerate a loosening of those manners and morals, the virtues that up to that point had been considered vital for its cohesion".⁶

The former stereotypes and biases against homosexuals have been altered in the twenty-first American society.

To lead their campaign to its utmost stage of normalization, the fervent supporters of homosexuality had to depathologize it and stop the demonization of people with AIDS who used to be considered as being "medically inferior, legally unequal, morally suspect, and socially outcast, with no right to reproduce."⁷ Therefore, Giffin's depiction of Jason as being fit, masculine, moral than many heterosexual males, and socially accepted serves the purpose of portraying gays' harmonious integration into society. They no longer represent a threat to the stability of the family and its dynamics as is the case of Jason who plays an important role in preserving the cohesion of the family.

Furthermore, in her endeavor to strengthen the image of the gay character and portray him as an ordinary person capable of naturally loving, giving, interacting within the family, and integrating into the larger society while maintaining the qualities that distinguish him from others, the author focuses on Valerie's relationship with her brother, Jason, by highlighting their closeness and the extent to which their relationship is harmonious. The reader feels the extent of Jason's sensitivity to his sister's deep suffering looming over her mind and the depths of her heart during the conversation they had after Valerie returned from eating with her child's doctor. Jason's intuition makes him notice the changes happening to his sister's emotional life through his hint at her attraction towards the surgeon and confirms it thanks to Valerie's positive response despite her attempt to hide her true feelings behind her natural shyness. The reader feels how keen Jason is to accompany his sister in every step she makes. He assists her in making her decisions carefully, especially after the failure of her first romantic relationship, which resulted in the escape of her lover and the birth of her son, Charlie. Her ultimate surrender to her tragic fate of raising her son alone and enduring society's perception of single women urges Jason to make sure that she does not repeat the mistake, and seeks to ascertain the nature of her feelings towards Nick, knowing that he is married and has children.

“The food was great. Here.” She tosses him the takeout bag as he mumbles something under his breath.

“What?” she says.

He repeats himself more slowly, loudly. “I said—I think someone has a crush on Dr. Beautimus.”

“Dr. Beautimus?” she says, standing to close the blinds. “Is that some slang term I don’t know about?”

“Yeah. Dr. Beautimus. Dr. Dime-piece.

” She laughs nervously and says, “Dime-piece?”

“A perfect ten,” Jason says, winking.

Valerie rolls her eyes and says, “I think you’re the one with the crush.”

Jason shrugs and says, “Yeah. He’s hot. But I’m not trying so hard to deny it.”

“I don’t go for married men,” she says emphatically. “I didn’t say you were going for him,” Jason says. “I just said you have a crush on him”.⁸

Jason continues to stand by his sister in the darkest of circumstances. In Chapter 36, Valerie is bewildered that she has not heard from Nick for days after their last meeting, in which they had a physical relationship. Valerie calls her brother and confides in him about her one-time physical relationship with Nick and her lack of contact with him since then. She also tries to understand the reasons for Nick's reluctance to the point of doubt and loss of confidence in herself. She asks her brother, "Am I beautiful?" Jason comforts his sister and tells her that she is very beautiful and that there is nothing wrong with her, but men are like that. Interestingly, he makes comparisons between heterosexual men and gays and is clearly biased towards gays, whom he describes as straight. Jason expresses pride in his gay lover Hank as a rare pearl, and his sister reinforces this sentiment when she describes the radiant tone of his voice whenever he talks about his gay partner.

Valerie recognizes Hank's excellence and how wonderful he was during his meeting with her son Charlie, who is just as attached, responsive, and enjoying his time with Hank as he used to be with his doctor and at the same time his mother's former lover, Nick. During this phone call with her brother, she discovers that he hid his knowledge of Nick's wife Tessa when he accidentally mentioned her name, then tried to convince her that she was the one who told him about her, but she assured him that she had never mentioned her name to anyone and that he was hiding something from her. He finally confesses that his lover Hank is Tessa's tennis coach. Valerie imagines what Tessa looks like and what kind of woman she is, and asks her brother about her beauty, and he replies that she is attractive but not beautiful to cheer her up.

By the end of the novel, Valerie finds only her brother Jason to support her and stand by her side after her emotional trauma for the second time and her state of frustration and brokenness after she meets her lover's wife Tessa, in which they frankly discuss the issue of her affair with Nick, and then meeting Nick, who told her that he puts an end to their relationship and chooses to preserve his small family and his love for his wife and children. Here, Jason shows his concern and support for his sister in this difficult circumstance that she is going through after the failure of her fleeting romantic relationship with Nick, and her deep disappointment due to his decision to abandon her and place the union of his family a top priority. She is disillusioned and hardly recognizes she has been running behind a mere illusion especially since she is very attached to Nick and has aspirations for a brighter future with him, despite knowing that he is married and has children, which would make her forget the pain of her former romantic relationship failure.

Valerie sticks to the facts now. "He's married with two kids . . . And he's Charlie's doctor. It's an all-around big problem," she says succinctly.

"Okay," Jason says. "Now we're getting somewhere. I thought maybe it was just me."

"No. It's not just you. I am perfectly aware that there is nothing about this situation that is right," she whispers resignedly. "And for the record, he knows it's wrong, too."

But. . .” “But you’re not going to stop seeing him?” Jason says in the voice of a brother, a best friend, a therapist, all rolled into one. “Are you?”

“No,” she says. “I can’t.”⁹

In the end, however, Valerie's only moral support is her brother, who stands by her side, alleviating her psychological pain and helping her overcome her ordeal, especially with her deteriorating relationship with her mother.

4. Conclusion

The tremendous efforts to promote a positive representation and achieve a large visibility of homosexuality within the American society have had to be backed up by the remarkable contribution of the media, television, arts, and literary production. American writers have to keep pace with the challenges that had to be surmounted, and the stereotypes that had to be altered by the supporters of homosexuality. In their long fight against anti-homosexual prejudice, they have had to promote an image of a gay who is socially fit, medically and morally equal to the heterosexual. This could be achieved thanks to the long struggle to depathologize homosexuality, and stop demonizing gays and considering them a threat to the heterosexual nuclear family.

Emily Giffin, like many other contemporary American figures, has joined the campaign to promote an empowering image of homosexuals. In her attempt to humanize the gay character, Giffin has successfully manifested her adherence to this worldwide campaign through the character of Jason in her novel *Heart of the Matter*. Although he is not the protagonist of the novel, it is easy to discern his central role and vital role in the narrative with his portrait of a masculine, medically and socially fit, and morally equal if not superior to his counterpart the heterosexual. In conclusion, Emily Giffin has contributed to transcending the negative offensive linguistic connotations of homosexual as “the invert”, “the outcast”, “the outsider”, “the countertype” used by journalists and social scientists decades ago, which have lost ground to a more progressive perception of what used to be regarded as male deviant sexuality. In other words, the dominant view was the one of the gay as a social outcast and

inferior countertype of the real citizen who has to remain in the margin into a full citizen with equal rights and a distinguished identity.

The elaborate description of Valerie's relationship with her gay brother Jason, and the emphasis on the latter's ability to show the bright human side of his personality falls within the author's endeavor to show the human side of the gay character as natural and spontaneous, no different from the heterosexual person. She adopts the contemporary vision of homosexuality that depicts it as a normal and natural phenomenon and portrays gay characters as ordinary individuals who can easily integrate into the family environment without disturbing the stability of family dynamics and any given society that accommodates all people regardless of the specificity of their sexual orientation.

The empowering representation and portrait of the gay character, Jason, by Emily Giffin in her novel *Heart of The Matter* expresses her involvement in supporting homosexuality and harnessing her literary production to fight the stereotypes that have stuck to homosexuals and substitute them with a positive portrayal that reveals the bright side of their personality and contributes to their acceptance by the family first and then society as a whole, facilitating their integration and eliminating the negative perception of society towards them and the feelings of hatred and discrimination against them.

5. References :

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2- According to Wikipedia, it is an acronym that stands for Lesbian,Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, asexual, and many other terms such as non-binary and pansexual.

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