

Motherhood, Power, and Resistance: Mother–Daughter Relationships in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Yifan Sun

Faculty of Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Sha Tin, New Territories, Hong Kong, China

Abstract

This article examines the mother–daughter relationship in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* through Adrienne Rich’s concept of motherhood as both lived experience and social institution, alongside an intertextual reading of *Perceval: The Story of the Grail* and *Jane Eyre*. It argues that motherhood in the novel functions as an institutionalized form of power through which religious ideology and patriarchal authority regulate female subjectivity. Jeanette’s adoptive mother embodies this institutional motherhood, transforming maternal love into a mechanism of discipline and control. By rewriting the narrative structure of “departure–trial–return,” Winterson exposes the limits of traditional religious and heroic paradigms while revealing the recursive nature of patriarchal domination. At the same time, the presence of non-biological maternal figures articulates alternative modes of maternal care grounded in ethical responsiveness and quiet resistance. This study demonstrates that *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* critiques institutionalized motherhood while reimagining maternal relations as a critical space for female self-definition.

Keywords

Institutionalized Motherhood; Intertextuality; Female Subjectivity.

1. Introduction

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit is the debut novel of contemporary British writer Jeanette Winterson. Written in the first person, the novel recounts the coming-of-age story of Jeanette, a girl adopted by a strict Pentecostal woman whose religious beliefs dominate family life. As Jeanette grows up, her awakening sense of self and sexual identity brings her into conflict with both the church and her mother. Rather than presenting this conflict simply as a struggle between belief and rebellion, the novel places the mother–daughter relationship at the center of Jeanette’s development, revealing how maternal love, authority, and control are deeply shaped by religious ideology and patriarchal values. While *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* has often been discussed in relation to feminism, sexuality, and narrative experimentation, the mother–daughter relationship has not always been fully examined as a structural force through which power and resistance are negotiated. In the novel, the mother functions not only as a parental figure but also as an agent of religious discipline, transmitting social norms and ideological authority to her daughter. Jeanette’s formation of subjectivity therefore unfolds through a persistent tension between emotional attachment to the mother and the need for separation from maternal authority, making the mother–daughter relationship a crucial site for understanding the novel’s critique of institutional power.

An important feature of Winterson’s narrative is its use of intertextuality, which plays a key role in shaping the representation of mother–daughter relations. The novel repeatedly draws on and rewrites earlier literary texts, including *Perceval: The Story of the Grail* and *Jane Eyre*, to parallel Jeanette’s struggle with inherited systems of authority. Intertextuality in this context

does not function merely as literary reference, but as a strategy for questioning the ideological foundations of traditional narratives that uphold religious and patriarchal values. As Julia Kristeva defines it, intertextuality involves the transposition of one sign system into another, through which earlier texts are transformed and re-signified in new historical and ideological contexts [1]. By rewriting canonical narratives, Winterson exposes the limitations of authoritative models of heroism, morality, and maternal authority, and opens up alternative possibilities for female identity. Through an analysis of mother–daughter relationships informed by Adrienne Rich’s theory of motherhood and Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, the novel reveals how institutionalized motherhood operates as a form of ideological control, while alternative maternal figures and reworked narrative patterns create spaces for resistance and self-definition. In this way, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* uses both maternal relationships and intertextual rewriting to challenge dominant power structures and imagine new forms of female subjectivity beyond institutional constraint.

2. Adrienne Rich’s Theory of Mother-daughter Relationship

In Anglo-American literary studies, the mother–daughter relationship has long been seen as an important area for the construction of female subjectivity. Relevant theories mainly come from feminist psychoanalysis and feminist literary criticism. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Nancy Chodorow points out that female identity is formed through continuous emotional identification with the mother rather than through separation. This structure gives women a strong ability for intimacy, but it also makes mother–daughter relationships more likely to involve dependence, repetition, and emotional tension [2]. Julia Kristeva places the mother outside the symbolic order and understands her as a pre-linguistic and pre-social “semiotic” presence. As a result, the mother–daughter relationship shows both attraction and rejection, and the daughter’s subjectivity is often established through symbolic separation from the mother. From a narrative perspective, Marianne Hirsch further argues that the mother–daughter relationship is not only a private emotional bond, but also a central narrative pattern in women’s writing. Through remembering, rewriting, or questioning their mothers’ life experiences, daughters are able to reconnect with female histories that have been hidden by patriarchy [3].

However, compared with psychoanalytic theories that mainly focus on psychological processes, Adrienne Rich’s theory of motherhood in *Of Woman Born* provides a more political and critical framework for analyzing mother–daughter relationships in literature. In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the conflict between mother and daughter is deeply shaped by religious discourse and patriarchal power structures. The mother is presented as an enforcer of religious discipline, and her “maternal love” is closely connected with control, punishment, and ideological teaching. For this reason, this study adopts Rich’s theory of motherhood as its main theoretical framework. In her book *Of Woman Born*, Rich points out the instrumentality latent in the maternal role and attempts to rescue mothers from the cross of patriarchy, exploring the possibility of a new kind of mother-daughter relationship.

First, Rich finds that motherhood exists in two distinct forms: the empirical nature of motherhood, and motherhood as a social agency and institution, with the latter often superimposed on the former: “the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control.” In patriarchal societies, for one thing, women’s possibilities are stifled by motherhood; for another, mothers are domesticated by the patriarchal system to become “qualified agents.” The patriarchal system controls them in various visible and invisible ways, and the mother becomes the social agency and institution of this control. Jeanette’s adoptive mother is an extreme case of the functional mother that Rich

criticizes as a form of patriarchal control rather than a real mother: Her motherly love is a cover for power manipulation.

Secondly, Rich also suggests that there is both sameness and contradiction between mothers and daughters. On the one hand, mothers and daughters can have a natural closeness due to a certain kind of knowledge, "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other-beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival-a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal". On the other hand, mothers and daughters have become the closest of rivals and strangers to each other, "The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr". In the eyes of the daughter, her mother is not only an object of humiliation and persecution by the patriarchy, but also an agent of domestication by the patriarchy, and thus an object of escape and avoidance for the daughter. Jeanette's adoptive mother was an irrational admirer of the pastor: she "was very excited" when Pastor Spratt invited her to attend church summer camp. Also, "she was the Old Testament through and through" and has a "weakness for the ministry". Under the surveillance of the patriarchal system, daughters are trapped in a cycle of "longing to be like mother - constantly running away from her - unable to get rid of her."

Thirdly, while criticizing motherhood as a "social institution and system," Rich advocates for the creation of an ideal mother who is independent, progressive, and courageous, and sketches the ideal mother as such: "A woman who has respect and affection for her own body, who does not view it as unclean or as a sex-object, will wordlessly transmit to her daughter that a woman's body is a good and healthy place to live. A woman who feels pride in being female will not visit her self-depreciation upon her female child." [4]. Mothers themselves should not view sexuality as an impurity, nor should they use it to teach their daughters. Jeanette's adoptive mother in *Oranges* views sexuality as unholy, while Elsie, another character who serves a parental function for Jeanette, is tolerant of Jeanette's sexuality. Mothers are also not supposed to pass on their low self-esteem to their daughters or use it to control their daughters by eliciting self-loathing. Jeanette's adoptive mother loathes her own homosexuality, which is out of place in the mainstream of society. Therefore, she instills in Jeanette a demeaning attitude towards homosexuality. In contrast, Elise has never been married and she is also out of step with the mainstream of society, but she does not have self-loathing, also she accepts Jeanette's homosexuality. This "ideal mother" should not be a self-disdain victim of obedience, but rather a self-respecting, self-loving, independent, and courageous creator and pioneer.

In *Orange* Jeanette is adopted by her mother and therefore does not have the first kind of motherhood: the empirical nature of motherhood that Rich proposes. The adoptive mother is the kind of mother which Rich called a "social institution and system." She did not adopt Jeanette out of a desire to raise a child, but rather to appeal to religious values as well as societal disciplines. Jeanette's ability to find her way back to her real self despite this kind of mothering is because she grew up with what Rich calls "non-biological mothers." They raise Jeanette on behalf of Jeanette's "real mother." *Jane Eyre's* Jane is also raised by "non-biological mothers," thus forming an intertextual relationship with *Oranges* in terms of plot as well as characterization. Another intertext under the theme of the mother-daughter relationship is *Perceva: The Story Of the Grail*. These two texts share similarities in the narrative framework, which forms their intertextual relationship: "departure-trial-return" for the knight's adventure; and "longing to be like mother - constantly running away from her - unable to get rid of her" for the mother-daughter relationship.

3. *Perceva: The Story of the Grail as an Intertext*

In Winterson's writing, Jeanette's power play with her mother forms a profound structural intertext relationship with *Perceva: The Story of the Grail*. By invoking and subverting medieval

chivalric narratives, Winterson situates the mother-daughter relationship in a complex web of religion, gender, and authority, revealing the patriarchal dilemmas to which they both face: both the court of King Arthur and the Christian family trap the individual in an eternal cycle of obedience and resistance through the promise of a "divine mission." In *Perceval: The Story of the Grail* the knights must be completely loyal to the omnipresent God, even in the arduous search for the Holy Grail, or risk divine punishment; in *Oranges*, in the Christian family, the mother, as the spokesperson of religious discipline, suppresses her daughter's subjectivity, and transmits patriarchal control over women to her daughter in the name of "religious belief." While the Holy Grail is the embodiment of religious sublime and the search for it requires purity and piety, Jeanette's goal is a secularized real self which includes her recognition of lesbian desires and her rebellion against her mother's religious fervor.

Among the many versions of the Holy Grail story, this chapter takes Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval: The Story of The Grail* as intertext. The reason for this choice is twofold. First, the plots of Sir Perceval in *Oranges* have no specific contextualization, but the arrival at a new castle that is not Camelot corresponds to the key plot of Chrétien's version: Sir Perceval enters the castle of Fisher King. For another, Winterson's rewriting of Sir Perceval is open-ended. It does not specify whether Sir Perceval obtains the Holy Grail or not, which corresponds to the fact that Chrétien's version is unfinished.

The structural intertextuality of the two texts is formed through the same "Departure-Trial-Return" framework. In Chrétien's *Perceval*, Sir Perceval sets out from King Arthur's court to avenge himself on Sir Kay and embarks on a journey to find the Holy Grail, which is the first part of the narrative structure - the hero's departure. Then he meets and defeats many knights on his journey and encounters the Holy Grail in the Fisher King's castle, but he fails to recognize the Grail, which results in his missing out on the growth of his religious divinity. Chrétien later described him as having amnesia for several years and losing himself completely. It is the second part of the narrative structure - the trial. Eventually, he regains his faith in God with the help of a clergyman, who atones for his previous actions by praying and confessing to God, and once again embarks on a journey to find the Holy Grail. Although Chrétien did not write it all, in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* Sir Percival eventually together with Galahad finds the Grail, which constitutes the final part of the narrative structure of the Adventure - the return or the success. However, in Winterson's version, Sir Perceval's story is interspersed in the main narrative and ends with Sir Perceval reaching the castle of the Fisher King and losing himself.

Sir Perceval's search for the Holy Grail appears four times in the novel, each describing a different stage of the journey, and the course of his journey is paralleled with the development of Jeanette's relationship with her mother. The two texts fit into the framework of "Departure-Trial-Return." However, it is slightly different from the traditional three-part framework of the original heroic narrative. Sir Perceval leaves and returns not to Camelot, but to the "symbolic castle" that symbolizes the centralized power of Christian rule: Sir Perceval's departure from Camelot to search for the Holy Grail - exhaustion in the forest - arrival at a new castle. This corresponds to Jeanette's departure and return to the family and church, which also symbolizes the centralized power of Christian rule: Jeanette's break with her mother and the Church and her departure - life alone in a strange city - return home for Christmas vacation.

The first is the "departure" section of the narrative framework. The first appearance of Sir Perceval's story in *Oranges* tells of his departure from Camelot and King Arthur's plea for stay. At this point King Arthur was the only one left in the palace of Camelot, all the knights had left for the Holy Grail and the kingship had lost its power to restrain the people. "But oh, Sir Perceval, come and turn cartwheels again" [5]. It is implied here that Sir Perceval is trapped under the power structure of King Arthur. This story segment is inserted after Jeanette's second lesbian love affair and her intimate behavior with her lover is discovered by church. Jeanette is verbally banished from the family by her mother, because Jeanette "made her ill, made the house ill,

brought evil into the church". To the conservative Christian mother, sexuality was "unholy" and homosexual love was "unnatural passion." Neither was allowed in the home or church. Jeanette's "departure" is the result of a violent expulsion rather than an adventure of the knight's own choosing, suggesting a lack of narrative sovereignty for women in patriarchal families. Sir Perceval's initiation is in retaliation for Sir Kay's mockery of him, wanting to achieve worldly fame by obtaining the Grail; Jeanette's initiation is for the quest for the self to be true to the real self. The emphasis on the quest for both in the secular world implies that truth may not necessarily lie on the side of the sacred but may be hidden in stigmatized secular experience. The "trial" part of the narrative frame corresponds to the second part of Sir Perceval and Jeanette's story. Sir Perceval's second story tells that he was exhausted after many days in the forest. He dreamed of reaching for the Holy Grail but only catches thorns, and then he dreamed of Arthur's court, where all his friends are dead and King Arthur has turned into a tree covered with ivy. When he wakes up, "his face bright with tears". This story emerges after Jeanette's second homosexual affair was tried by the church, which determines that Jeanette needs to undergo a stronger exorcism and spend two weeks in retreat at the Morecambe guest house, accompanied by her mother. Jeanette had already experienced the church's devastation once after the church found out about her first homosexual affair with Melanie, and that time she silently endured it and remained in the church community. However, Jeanette does not give in this time and is determined to leave the church, "I'm leaving the church, so you can forget the rest".

The third and fourth stories are interspersed with Jeanette's first trip home for Christmas after breaking with church. By this time the church had been disbanded due to corruption, which has an ironic effect. Jeanette's mother, still with a fervent religious zeal, takes part in various religious events, "now she regularly spoke to Christians all over England, as well as listening to the radio. Already, there were plans of a meeting, and a newsletter for electronic believers". Sir Perceval's third story tells of his arrival at another castle. The dwarf leads him into a room and let him rest until sunset. He blames himself for leaving King Arthur's palace, recalling that on the last night he left Camelot, King Arthur tied a bell to his horse and cried that he had nothing left. As he falls asleep, he returns to the day when the Holy Grail appeared at the Round Table, and all the knights swore an oath to go in search of the Holy Grail, while King Arthur "had sat silent looking out the window." Then he woke up from his sleep and went to visit the host of this new castle. The fourth part of Sir Perceval's story is about Sir Perceval's reflections on his journey after he meets the host of the castle. The host believes that Sir Perceval left because of the decline of Arthur's palace, while Sir Perceval knows that it was for his own selfish desire to leave that he caused the downfall of Arthur's court. He believes that there is a force pulling him back to Camelot, "He felt himself being pulled like a bobbin of cotton, so that he was dizzy and wanted to give in to the pull and wake up round familiar things". Winterson's portrayal of Sir Perceval's story ends with Perceval ultimately trapped within the bonds of religious centralization, tripped up by memories of his former time in King Arthur's court, and driven by his guilt over King Arthur to long to return to Camelot.

Both Sir Perceval's and Jeanette's "trials" end in failure. Sir Perceval arrives at another castle to symbolize a new trial, but remains trapped in the same power structure, an extension of King Arthur's power. Jeanette returns to her family and still confronts her mother's unshaken religious authority: the mother still travels for various religious activities, such as "traveling with Pastor Finch and his demon bus" and "be a help to other distressed parents with demon-possessed children"; The mother still has no understanding of Jeanette's past and her "particular sins were listed in the self-help kit". However, Jeanette's perspective has changed: she realized that the patriarchal religious values maintain the essence of their own authority by controlling the mother, and consequently the mother is reduced to a social agency and institution under the religious influence. The contrasting intertext suggests that patriarchy is

regenerative and powerful, but that the subject can achieve inner liberation through cognitive transformation.

Rich points out that patriarchy forces women to volunteer for exploitative caregiving by romanticizing motherhood as a sacred calling, and Winterson reveals patriarchal oppression of women and mothers by portraying an extreme mother who does not perform her duties. This form of control echoes what Michel Foucault describes as modern disciplinary power, which operates not through overt violence but through continuous surveillance and normalization in everyday institutions such as the family and the church [6].

4. Jane Eyre as an Intertext

This essay has analyzed *Jane Eyre* from the perspectives of female subjectivity in Chapter 2, and this part will further interpret this intertext through Rich's theory of mother-daughter relationship. Rich has suggested in her book *Of Woman Born* that "Many of the great mothers have not been biological". She also used Jane Eyre as an example to explain, "the motherless Jane time after time finds women who protect, solace, teach, challenge, and nourish her in self-respect.". So Rich emphasizes maternal nourishment is not necessarily born biologically, and that "for centuries, daughters have been strengthened and energized by nonbiological mothers". In *Jane Eyre*, her first substitute mother is Bessie, a servant in Jane's aunt's house. She takes care of Jane and is polite and friendly to her. When Jane is away at school, she cries to the guard "Be sure and take good care of her". At school, Miss Temple acted as Jane's substitute mother in education, and Jane said of her, "to her instruction I owed the best part of my acquirements; her friendship and society had been my continual solace: she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and, latterly, companion". At Thornfield Hall, Jane's substitute mother was Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, who did not look down on Jane, but entertained her with sumptuous meals, which made Jane involuntarily become fond of her, "I drew my chair a little nearer to her, and expressed my sincere wish that she might find my company as agreeable as she anticipated" [7].

Meanwhile, Jeanette has a mother but was not really and truly cared for by her mother, Rich argues that "the woman who has felt "unmothered" may seek mothers all her life-may even seek them in man". Jeanette, like Jane, has found her substitute mother, Elsie, and Miss Jewsbury. Miss Jewsbury ensured Jeanette's health as a child. Jeanette was deaf for three months with her adenoids, but no one noticed. Jeanette found that when she went to church no one sang except her. At first, she thought it was lord "working in mysterious ways," so did Jeanette's mother. Then Jeanette realized she was deaf, and she wrote her mother a note saying, "Mother, the world is very quiet". The mother just nodded and went on about her religious business. It is only when Jeanette finally offers to write a note to Miss Jewsbury that Miss Jewsbury realizes Jeanette is deaf and takes her to the hospital. Miss Jewsbury's motives for Jeanette's care were not pure, however; she seduced Jeanette and had sex with her after realizing her homosexual tendencies, "Her hand crept lower and lower. She bent over me; I could feel her breath on my neck. Quite suddenly I turned and kissed her". Miss Jewsbury, while caring for Jeanette, also sexually grooms Jeanette.

Compared to Miss Jewsbury, the care that Elsie gives Jeanette is more comprehensive and more in tune with Jeanette's needs because Elsie was imagined by Winterson as she imagined her mother to be. She explains in her other work *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* that Elsie is a fictional character who exists to take care of little Jeanette. This intertextuality between works by the same author constitutes a dynamic self-talk that accumulates energy for the repeated writing of marginal experiences, and they will eventually subvert the stability of the central discourse. Elsie compensates for Jeanette's lack of motherhood through multiple

dimensions in her upbringing, providing Jeanette with critical companionship, emotional support, spiritual and identity guidance.

After knowing the truth, her mother still did not fulfill her duty of care and concern for Jeanette. She left Jeanette alone in the hospital, although Jeanette feels anxious, "Why was she leaving me here? I started to cry.". It was Elsie who took her mother's place and stayed with Jeanette in the hospital, "I might have languished alone for the rest of the week, if Elsie hadn't found out where I was, and started visiting me. Jeanette's adoptive mother was always excusing herself from taking care of Jeanette for various reasons. After Jeanette's hospitalization, her mother remained indifferent to Jeanette while Elsie took over the responsibility to care for Jeanette, who decided "to go and stay with Elsie for a couple of days, until her mother got home from Wigan". The school taught the girls needlework and asked them to make something of their own. When the neighboring girl chose to make embroidered cloths for her mother, Jeanette chose to make for Elsie, "I decided to make a sampler for Elsie Norris". Jeanette basks in Elsie's protective care and unconsciously considers Elsie her real mother.

Carol Gilligan's ethics of care emphasizes relational understanding and emotional responsiveness rather than abstract moral judgment, a mode of care exemplified by Elsie's non-punitive support of Jeanette [8]. When Jeanette's adoptive mother harshly suppressed Jeanette's self-expression with Christine doctrines, Elsie provided emotional support as an accepting, non-judgmental listener. For example, when Jeanette was judged by the church for her homosexuality, Elsie did not condemn her but offered comfort with a hug. Instead of using language as a punishment like her mother did, Jeanette and Elsie "didn't talk about it, not the rights or wrongs or anything," and chose to "sit by the fire together like they used to" in silence and comfort. This unconditional care deconstructs the violent logic of the adoptive mother's "love as discipline." Elsie is the enlighteners of Jeanette's spiritual revolt. Elsie first teaches Jeanette to distinguish between the self and the social discipline, "'There's this world,' she banged the wall graphically, 'and there's this world,' she thumped her chest. 'If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both.'". This is the premise of Jeanette's realization of self-subjectivity and her rebellion against religious values. Secondly Elsie uses covert blasphemous behaviors to demonstrate to Jeanette that resistance need not be a grandiose declaration but can be an ongoing gesture that permeates the everyday. Elsie practices small acts of resistance with seemingly innocuous behaviors: using divination in the Christian community, "Her hobby was numerology, and she never read the Word without first casting the dice to guide her", naming mice after the positive biblical figures of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and intentionally hanging Scripture embroidered cloth upside down on the wall. She is aware of Jeanette's homosexuality but chooses not to report it, creating a safe rift in the religious community through the strategy of turning a blind eye [9]. This passive resistance inspires Jeanette to understand the wisdom of survival in the cracks of power.

Finally, Elsie shows Jeanette the strategy of survival as a single woman. She is unmarried for life and living in self-sufficient isolation, proving that a woman can exist in her entirety outside of the institution of marriage. Her very existence is a silent challenge to the Christian domesticity defended by Jeanette's mother. Both of Jeanette's substitute mothers give her the possibility of a better vision, which is what Rich describes as "the most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities". Their contrast with Jeanette's adoptive mother's indifference and authoritarianism highlights the downsides of instrumentalized motherhood as an institution that sustains a patriarchal society. Their intertextuality with Jane's substitute mothers not only supports the feasibility of Rich's conception of the "ideal mother," but also energizes the deconstruction of patriarchal narratives and the breaking down of patriarchal constraints on women.

Taking Rich's theory of mother-daughter relationship as a framework, this chapter explores the complexity of Jeanette's relationship with her mother in *Oranges*, combining the intertextual

analysis of *Perceval and Jane Eyre*. Through the narrative structure of “departure-trial-return,” Jeanette contrasts with Sir Perceval, revealing the dual discipline of patriarchy on female subjectivity through religion and family: the mother is alienated as an agent of religious authority, and her motherly love is actually an extension of the manipulation of power. At the same time, the novel echoes the redemptive power of the non-biological mother in *Jane Eyre* and deconstructs the instrumentality of traditional motherhood through the portrayal of Elsie and Miss Jewsbury as alternative mothers. Through Elsie's small resistance and emotional support, Winterson shows how women find independent living space in the gap of patriarchal power, practicing the qualities of “ideal mother” advocated by Rich: those who has self-esteem, independence, and creativity, and finally providing a possibility for Jeanette's awakening of the subjectivity [10].

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the mother–daughter relationship in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* through Adrienne Rich's theory of motherhood, together with an intertextual analysis of *Perceval: The Story of the Grail and Jane Eyre*. The novel reveals how motherhood, when shaped by religious and patriarchal ideology, becomes an institutional force that disciplines female subjectivity. Jeanette's adoptive mother is thus presented not simply as an oppressive individual, but as an agent of religious authority whose maternal love is closely bound to power and control. Through the shared narrative pattern of “departure–trial–return,” Winterson's rewriting of the Perceval story exposes the limits of traditional heroic and religious narratives that demand obedience and self-denial. In contrast to these models, Jeanette's journey emphasizes the search for a secular and embodied self, highlighting the dual discipline imposed on women through both family and faith. At the same time, the novel offers an alternative vision of motherhood through non-biological maternal figures, particularly Elsie. Her emotional support and quiet resistance reflect the qualities of the “ideal mother” described by Rich. By combining mother–daughter relationships with intertextual rewriting, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* critiques institutionalized motherhood while imagining new forms of maternal connection that enable resistance and self-recognition. In doing so, the novel reclaims motherhood as a contested but transformative space for the development of female subjectivity.

References

- [1] Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Translated by Thomas Gora et al., edited by Leon Samuel Roudiez, New York, N.Y., Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 64–91.
- [2] Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley University of California Press, 1978.
- [3] Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot*. Indiana University Press, 1989.
- [4] Rich, Adrienne Cécile. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London, Virago, 1976.
- [5] Winterson, Jeanette. *Orange Are Not the Only Fruit*. New York, Grove Press, 2007.
- [6] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York, Vintage Books, 1977.
- [7] Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. Edited by Richard J Dunn, New York, Norton, C, 2001.
- [8] Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1982.
- [9] [Elizabeth Wanning Harries, “Changing the Story: Fairy Tale, Fantasy, Myth”. *The History of British Women's Writing*, Vol.10,2015

[10] Julie Ellam, Love in Jeanette Winterson's Novels, New York: Consterus New Series, 2010