

## Critical overview of parents' influence on children's psychology in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

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**ABSTRACT** : Jeanette Winterson in her semi-autobiographical novel exposes through a character named Jeanette her life from childhood. She particularly describes the different aspects that matter in her life as a little girl especially religion and the relationship with her father and mother until she discovered her sexual identity and leaves the house. This research work explores the implication of Jeanette's parents in her late choices. The objective of this research work is to show that parents do influence their children's psychology more than what they think. After the collection of data and the use of literary theories (Psychoanalytic theory and Cultural materialism), it appears that parents can influence their children's psychology through different aspects as education, religion, behaviour, degree of interaction with men. It is also important to notice that whatever parents do and however they behave or educate their children, it will always have an impact on their children's psychology. Parents can build them or destroy them. It is then parents' duty to find the perfect balance for educating their children by focusing on their personalities and most importantly on their social realities. That is the clue for them to build their future, become good persons with good mental health or not.

**KEY WORDS:** *Influence, psychology, education, behaviour, success.*

### Résumé

Jeannette Winterson dans son roman semi-autobiographique expose au travers d'un personnage nommé elle-même Jeannette sa vie depuis son enfance. Elle décrit particulièrement les aspects qui ont comptés dans sa vie de jeune fille spécialement la religion, la relation avec son père et sa mère jusqu'à la découverte de son identité sexuelle suivi de son départ de la maison. L'importance de ce travail de recherche est d'explorer l'implication des parents de Jeannette dans les choix de leur fille. L'objectif de ce travail de recherche est de montrer que les parents influencent la psychologie des enfants plus qu'ils ne le pensent. Après la collecte des données et l'utilisation de théories littéraires (théorie psychanalytique, Matérialisme culturel), il en ressort que les parents peuvent influencer la psychologie de leurs enfants à travers différents aspects comme l'éducation, la religion, le comportement, le degré d'interaction avec les hommes. Il est aussi important de notifier que quelque soit ce que les parents font ou la manière dont ils se comportent ou éduquent leurs enfants, cela aura toujours un impact sur ces derniers. Les parents peuvent modeler leurs enfants ou les détruire. Il revient donc aux parents de trouver le parfait équilibre pour éduquer leurs enfants en se focalisant sur leur personnalité et plus important sur les réalités de la société. C'est la clé qu'il faut aux enfants pour construire leur future, devenir ou non de bonnes personnes avec une bonne santé mentale.

**Mots clés :** Influence, psychologie, éducation, comportement, succès.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Almost all children are born and growing up in a family. They are raised according to the principles and values specific to their family or society. Family's education thus aimed at making them later models' men and women. To achieve this, parents, guarantors of their children's education proceed according to the methods that seems effective to them. Children during their evolution process begin to unveil a certain type of behaviour resulting from their childhood. That is the case of Jeanette in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, a semi-autobiographical novel written by Jeanette Winterson. In the novel, the author relates the childhood of a young girl in a very religious family where strict values and rules were transmitted to hereby her parents. Those values and rules have psychologically influenced her. Winterson also exposes throughout the novel, the sanctity of

family life as something of a shame, the perception of love according to the church and difficulties homosexuals go through in the society.

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* was published in March 1985. Subdivided into eight (08) chapters plus the introduction and made of 146 pages, its main focuses are lesbianism, love, religion, transgression and forgiveness. This research work's focus is the Influence of Parents on children psychology in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

The present study is divided into three (03) sections. The first section makes a view on the theoretical background of the study regarding the work's organisation. The second section is about the novel, the different characters and their participation. It helps to make a deeper understanding about the topic throughout the exploration of parent's influence on children's psychology. Finally, the third chapter is about the critical outlook and perspectives based on parents and their influence on children's psychology.

## **1-Theoretical background of the study**

### **1-1- Introduction to the study**

#### **1-1-1. Problem statement**

This research work focuses on Parents' influence on children's psychology in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. The feeling of writing on that topic rises while reading the book. In fact, the novel relates the reality of our society regarding the fact that parents influence their children through the education they give them. A child that grows up in a family ends up adapting to the family's life model in which he lives. Parents therefore show the path that has to be taken. Based on their education and their experience within the family, they will build their personality and take their decisions. The present research work aims at bringing out how much parents can influence their children's psychology.

#### **1-1-2. Purpose of the study**

One decides to write on this topic for social and professional issues. First of all, this work helps the reader to understand how bad parents can influence their children basing on the way they teach them. It is especially useful to know the limit not to cross when it comes to child's education. Secondly, this work helps English learners especially those who are in British studies or any other person that loves English to have a better and deeper understanding about *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* that deals with a very sensitive topic, reality of our society.

#### **1-1-3. Significance and Limitation of the study**

This research work focuses on the in-depth study of parents' influence and the way it can impact a child's life. As a significant work, it can be used as a literary source, as a sample in some researches based on such a similar topic. In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the author reached out many themes like lesbianism, religion to mention some among others. She exposes the family life system and the different issues that follows it. This work is solely focused on the influence that parents can have on their children's psychology.

#### **1-1-4. Clarification of the major concepts**

For this topic, two major concepts need to be clarified for a better understanding. According to *Merriam-webster's dictionary*, the term Influence is the power or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways. It is also defined as the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command.

The term psychology according to *Merriam-webster's dictionary* is the science of mind and behaviour. Especially here in our context, it is the mental, emotional and behavioural characteristics pertaining to a specific person, group or activity. From the previous definition, we can define parents' influence on children's psychology as the power of parents to control or manipulate in indirect or direct ways their children's mentality, emotions and behaviours. In other terms, it means that parents are directly or indirectly responsible of what become their children.

#### **1-1-5. Research methodology**

This work is a critical exploration conducted to explore parents' influence on children's psychology in Jeanette Winterson's novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. To collect the data necessary for this work, some researches have been made online in order to know more about the author, her work and furthermore to have access to the different works that have been done previously on the subject. After the collection of data, some literary theories have been used to make a deep analysis of the novel. The first one is the **Psychoanalytic theory**. Sigmund Freud was the first that laid out that theory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This theory role is to show that human's behaviour is determined by some factors that influenced unconscious mind. It also shows that childhood events could influence the mental functioning of adults. In this work, this theory helps us understand more the action, decisions of the characters basing on what they faced and which have influenced them. The

second literary theory is **cultural materialism**, an anthropological research orientation first introduced by Marvin Harris in his 1968 book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, as a theoretical paradigm and research strategy. In our context, it helps us to understand more how the characters' motives and actions in the novel.

### 1-1-6. Literature review

Many authors and scholars have been interested in Jeanette Winterson's work, some of them rather focused on the relation between parents' influence and children's psychology.

Kayla Gripps and Brett Zyromski (Southern Illinois University Carbondale) in their article *Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Parental Involvement: Implications for Parental Involvement in Middle Schools*, *Review of General Psychology*, 2004, Vol. 8, 3, 163-178, showed interest at the involvement of parents in their children's psychological well-being. For them, adolescence is a critical period of development and parents' involvement affects a child psychological well-being whether it is positive or negative. The child's psychological well-being takes into account especially the self-esteem, and self-evaluation, peer relationships, and frequency of negative familial events (Amato, 1994; Amato & Ochiltree, 1986; Buri et al., 1987; Dekovic & Meeus, 1997; Dimitrieva et al., 2004; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Gecas, 1971; Gibson & Jefferson, 2006; Roberts & Bengton, 1993; Wilkinson, 2004). Parents through their parenting styles (authoritative/democratic) influence children during and after adolescence in the areas of adolescent development, self-evaluation, self-esteem and adjustment, as well as intrinsic motivation to learn in a positive manner (Baumrind, 1966, 2005; Buri et al.; Doyle & Markiewicz, 2005; Gecas; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Steinberg, 2001).

Susan D. Witt in *Parental Influence on Children's Socialisation to Gender Roles, ADOLESCENCE*, vol. 32, No. 126, Summer 1997, exposes that children through the childhood to the adolescence are exposed to some factors which influence their behaviour and attitudes; Attitudes and behaviours that are first learned at home before being reinforced after by the child's peers, school experience, and television viewing. The multitude of ideas, behaviours, beliefs and attitudes that the child is exposed to build his self-concept. She summarised by adding that the information that surrounds the child and which is internalised comes to the child within the family arena through parent-child interactions, role modelling, reinforcement for desired behaviours, and parental approval or disapproval (Santrock, 1994).

Eleanor E. Maccoby interested herself also into the balance between the way parents do educate their child and the effects it produces on them. In her review *Parenting and its Effects on Children: On Reading and Misreading Behaviour Genetics*, Eleanor E. Maccoby, 2000, Volume 51, she explains that it is undeniable that parents can and do influence children. She points out the fact that genetic makeup affects children's own behavioural characteristics and also influence the way they are treated by their parents. Maccoby explores children's genetic predispositions and their parents' childrearing and the ways they function jointly to affect children's development. She mentioned two authors, Rowe's book, *The Limits of Family Influence* (1994), and Harris's more popular book *The Nurture Assumption* (1998) that have drowned together the findings from some well-known studies of parenting effects and findings from behaviour genetics to make three major claims:

The connections that studies have founded between the way parents deal with their children and how the children turn out are actually quite weak and have proved difficult to replicate. When parent "effects" are found, they tend to be effects on the way children behave at home and the relationships they develop with their parents. There is a little carry-over from at-home experiences to the way children function in out-of-home contexts. The second major point is that when studies do establish connections between parenting and children's attributes, these are correlational findings. An example is Baumrind & Black (1967). Such findings have traditionally been interpreted as showing that authoritative parenting has beneficial effects on children, ignoring the possibility that the causal connection may run the other way-i.e., that competent, cooperative children may make it easier for their parents to be firm and responsive. In fact, the critics argue, parent behaviour is substantially driven by the behaviour of children, and much if not most of the parent/child correlation can be accounted for by the child's genetic predispositions. This contribution is in line with our research because Mrs. Winterson's authoritative behaviour has led Jeanette astray as far as social relationships making are concerned. She becomes a rebel to her mother's ideas. The third point raised out is that Parental influence has been emphasised at the expense of sources of influence that in fact have great-or perhaps greater-importance in shaping children's development. Two kinds of influence which critics argue have been underemphasised are genetic predispositions and the influence of peers.

Parents' influence on their children is also expended to school. It is that path that Wendy S. Grolnick, Corina Benjet, Carolyn O. Kurowski, and Nicholas H. Apostoleris of Clark University mentioned in their work entitled *Predictors of Parent Involvement in Children's Schooling*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol.89, No.5, 538-548, 1997. For them, the more parents are involved in their children's learnings, the more their children are successful. In the family context, the parent's behaviour is also determining. From an ecological perspective, the social context of parenting will be a key contributor to the way resources are allotted to the child. In their purpose of examining multiple factors at several levels that might affect various aspects of parent involvement, they focus mostly on mothers because they are the most involved in their children's schooling

(Cone et al., 1985; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). This also helps to a contribution with our research work. All along the novel, Jeanette seems to be more attached to her mother than anyone else. Jeanette's mother is the one that has finally influenced the most her daughter.

## 2-General overview on the novel

### 2-1. The novel

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a semi-autobiographical novel written by Jeanette Winterson during the winter of 1983 and the spring of 1984, and published in 1985. In this novel, the author exposes her life when she was seven years old and living in England with her adoptive parents; with a bit pinch of fiction through a character that is named same as herself. Jeanette's family were a fundamentalist Christian but her mother was the most religious member of the family. She represents the dominant character of the house and mostly of Jeanette's life. Jeanette's father meanwhile is a passive person that is almost never present. Jeanette's mother was in charge of her daughter's education and mostly taught her to read the Bible and all what was concerning God. Jeanette grows up in that environment and by time goes on, her interest was more toward girls. She turns out being a lesbian and fall in love. Her mother and church congregation being against her sexual identity try to make her change her mind but nothing. So, her mother forces her to leave the house. She went through many jobs to take care of herself and never denied her sexuality. When she finally decides to go see her mother, the latter does not interfere again in Jeanette's love affair but indeed still the same faithful woman she was.

### 2-2. Exploring Parents and their influences

Parents can and do influence their children. In order to build their child personality, each parent has a different approach in the way they guide and interact with them. In return, they different methods influence their children's psychology and lead them to what they become later. After exploration, we notice the influence of Jeanette's parents at three different levels which are school domain, social domain and personal domain.

Jeanette grows up in a very religious family and for her mother especially, religion is one of the most important things to be respected. She decided to adopt a child and dedicates him to the Lord, makes him a missionary. That idea of getting a child and make it a missionary comes to Jeanette's mother through a dream.

*"My mother, out walking that night, dreamed a dream and sustained it in a daylight. She would get a child, train it, build it dedicate it to the Lord: a missionary child, a servant of God, a blessing"* (page 26).

That is how Jeanette ends up being a member of that family. From there, Jeanette's mother objective is to do whatever is possible so that her child fulfils her desire.

### 2-4-1. Parents' influence on children's psychology in school domain

It is important to notice that the most significant factor in Jeanette's life is her education. So as far as it is concerned, Jeanette's mother did not want to send her child to school, a place that she considers as a "Breeding Ground". She keeps her daughter at home teaching her regularly how to read from Bible. Jeanette at seven years old already bears a huge knowledge about religious things. When Jeanette finally started school, she went through troubles and depression for being too religious for a child of her age because all what she was doing or saying was always related to God. Regarding that, Mrs Virtue and Mrs Vole decide to have a conversation with her. They make her understand that she was terrorizing her fellow mates by speaking of hell. They finally decide to write to Jeanette's mother about the situation (page 50). The point here is that the education Jeanette has received at home is not adequate to her or any other child of her age. It has led her to depression and make difficult her insertion among her peers.

### 2-4-2. Parents' influence on children's psychology on social domain

Jeanette's mother has a great hostility towards what she considers as enemies. She does not like sex, some places and show a kind of disgust for men. Since the day she has her bad experience about sex, she considers it as something very unholy. There is also the Maxi Ball that Jeanette's mother hates a lot. To avoid her child to go there, she makes a kind of brainwash by filling Jeanette's mind with some horrors. *"My mother would rather not eat than been at Maxi Ball's. She filled me with a horror of the place"*. (Page 23). As far as men are concerned, Jeanette's mother considers them as no wise. *"We had no Wise Men because she didn't believe there were any wise men, but we had sheep."* She used to tell her daughter how bad men are and how they don't deserve her. With that, Jeanette without knowing anything about men and their relationships in real life doesn't already like them and her interaction with people of the society is a bit reduced.

### 2-4-3. Parents' influence on children's psychology in personal domain

There is an ultimate detail not to miss in Jeanette's family. Most of the decisions are taking by the mother. She behaves like the head of the family. That behaviour can be justified by the fact that she thinks there is no wise men. She represents by the same way the figure of authority of family. For example, every Sunday that she has to pray, she does not want anybody to be into the parlour until a given hour. *"My mother got up early on Sundays and allowed no one to be into the parlours until ten o'clock."* (Page 22). Sometimes, Jeanette's mother cooks based on whether the Missionary Report was good or not and that's a point that does not profit the other members of the family but she still convinced that she is the one to decide.

*"The Missionary Report was a great trial to me because our mid-day meal depended upon it. If it went well, [...], my mother cooked a joint. If the Godless had proved not [...]. He would have cooked it himself but for my mother's complete conviction that she was the only person in our house who would tell a saucepan from a piano."* (Page 23).

Jeanette's mother herself is a kind of missionary. All her existence is based on religion. She concedes a big importance to God's work sometimes more than her family. Referring to the day Jeanette lost her hears and stays at hospital, her mother rarely comes to visit her. Instead of staying with one of her parents, Jeanette almost spent all her sojourn with another woman, Elsie that she enjoys the company. As far as Jeanette's father is concerned, he is very passive, works in a factory and leaves home early. He is not very much at home and when he is present, he doesn't interact too much with his daughter or his wife. Jeanette's father shows a total absence of authority in his own house and relies on the demands of his wife. He embodies perfectly the role of "a weak man" that Jeanette's mother never stopped to repeat to her daughter. By the way, Jeanette never saw her parents being romantic to each other added to the fact that her mother considers heterosexual love as a sin. As a result, Jeanette ends up being a lesbian, has been forced to leave the house. She struggled to survive but refused to be a person she is not. Looking more closely, Jeanette inherited the rigor and determination of her mother. She acquires the values transmitted by her mother, the fact of being a strong woman but it doesn't help for Jeanette's mother basic objective.

### 3-Critical outlook and perspectives

#### 3-1. Critical outlook of Parents' influence on children's Psychology

Every parent has the dream that his child grows up and become a certain type of person they expect. But sometimes, they don't always realize that due to the education they give their children, they could become something that is completely opposed to their parents' expectations. The main objective of Jeanette's mother was to train her child and dedicate her to God. Jeanette's mother was hardly trying to keep her child away of the external world by teaching her at home. She has almost indoctrinated her daughter with the kind of education and the way she proceeded by preventing her to make her own conception of the world. She had preferred to lock her daughter inside instead of letting her face the realities of their society. People are more receptive and influenced during their childhood. It is the perfect time to show them what to do, how and why to do it; the right time to shape them. Jeanette's mother obeys to that law. She teaches her daughter about religion and at seven, Jeanette's knowledge about God was more than what it should be. There is the first flaw in Jeanette's mother method. She is responsible of the depression that Jeanette went through when she has started school. She was so religious that the other children started bullying her. The fact that those children were having nightmares after some Jeanette's stories shows how too young they are to handle those teachings. Jeanette did not know anything else a part of God before starting school. In that condition, it is difficult for a child to fit in when he/her gets out of the comfort zone. Unfortunately, once in the contact of the world, Jeanette has discovered the flaws, the confusion that exists in religion and in her mother's thoughts. That's why it is important for parents to aware children about the different realities that exist. Other flaw in Jeanette's mother method is her perception about men. Jeanette has been confronting to her mother always saying bad about men and the fact that they aren't wise. Anyway, Jeanette never saw her parents being affectionate to each other. It may look like something normal for her while it is not. In Jeanette's family, Jeanette's mother is seeming as the authoritarian figure and her daddy as a weak person. Her father never shows a piece of authority within the family circle. Jeanette's interactions with a masculine presence are very limited. Normally, a dad is the one supposed to be the head of the family but that was not the case. Growing up that condition, she gets the male fiber developed by her mother. She may have seen that all men are weak and as she does not want to be with a weak, no wise as her mother used to say, she decided to guide her feelings to a girl.

In one way or another Jeanette's parents, especially her mother represents through her teachings and behavior a direct or indirect responsible for what has become her daughter: a lesbian. Things should have been different if only Jeanette's parents find a better way of educating their child. There are so much other factors coming from the parents that can negatively influence children's psychology. Most of the time, it can contribute to their good development but it can be in a bad way as well. Some events like the disagreement between parents, the fights, their divorce, too much severity, the absence of quality time are some among others things

that surely do impact children's psychology. It causes to the child many ailments like depression, problem of self-esteem, anti-social behaviors and sometimes even suicide.

### 3-2. Personal stand on Parents' influence on children's psychology

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* being a novel that tackles some important subjects. The main theme, lesbianism is a special aspect of the society that we rarely discover in our different books. Jeanette Winterson narrates her childhood in the familial cocoon until her adolescence age. In her story, there is a kind of cause-effect relationship that also exist in our daily life and to which we don't really pay attention to. Parents are the first and major actors of their children's education especially before they (children) start to interact with their peers. Children grow up having as models their parents. Their first reflex is to imitate what their parents do. Also, children are called to interact with many people a part of their family and by the way almost never stop get influenced. Sometimes, when parents try to protect their children from a certain thing by hiding them, Children seem to be more curious about it. They try to understand the why and how and they finally get the answer outside of the family system.

### 3-3. Perspectives

Parents' influence on children's psychology is a basic in our society. Parents' bad influence on their children's psychology may be prejudicial in many areas.

#### 3-3-1. Social domain

The way parents educate their children may have a direct impact in social domain. A rigorous education is a double-edged sword. A child can be educated by parents that are too rigorous lack a confidence in himself and live in autarcia whether it can help the child to be disciplined and respectful. A child with confidence will have the facility to integrate himself into the society, build relationship and more importantly learn how-to live-in society.

#### 3-3-2. Professional domain

As far as the professional domain is concerned, the influence exercised by parents on children's psychology may be a factor of progress or regress. Indeed, at school, a child badly influenced by his parents may be disinterested by the work carried on during lectures, he may be a source of distraction for his fellow students or else become violent in order to externalize his bitterness and his anger. Step by step, the children will develop vices and transform himself into a recalcitrant individual hated by everybody.

#### 3-3-3. Economical domain

In the economic field, a child who grew up in a family of thieves and rustles can only be a thief and rustle by becoming an adult. Such a person appointed to a position of responsibility will only embezzle funds for personal purposes, corrupt, use vile stratagems to dilapidate intrinsic resources to global development. Above all, a poorly educated child and influenced by a demagogue and unorthodox psychology can only become a brigand that will cast the system from the inside. He will collapse large companies and finally the whole economic system will pass.

#### 3-3-4. Environmental domain

As far as the environment is concerned, children do behave the way their parents do. So, if parents are respectful toward the nature and make sure to keep everything clean around them, then children will grow up keeping that respect for their environment. That will help a lot to avoid pollution and the city will look cleanest.

### 3-4. Recommendation

As far as we can't prevent a child of growing up in a family, parents' influence remains something inescapable. It is therefore important for parents to act and behave wisely in front of their children. Most importantly, it's necessary to find a balance in the way of educating children, being authoritative, communicative, loving when it is necessary to allow children to guarantee their future and our country's development.

## II. Conclusion

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson being a semi-autobiographical novel which makes the representation of lesbianism and religion in the British context. It depicts more the religious aspect of Jeanette's family. This research work is concerned with knowing how parents can influence their children psychology to the extent that they become the total opposite of what he or she was expected to become. To handle this topic, we made use of collection data and the use of literary theories as psychoanalytic and critical materialization theory to understand more the novel, to make an exploration and a critical analysis on it. After using these theories, we come to the conclusion that parents are the one that influence their children's psychology.

Whatever parents do, it has a direct or indirect impact on the child's psychology. That influence that is supposed to build a good person can turn into a bad one and make the total opposite. In the family arena, they are the example that children follow. Jeanette in her family has as a figure of authority her mother. Jeanette's father is almost never present and doesn't interact with the rest of the family. Jeanette grows up following and looking at her parents and especially her mother. These situations lead Jeanette to an opposed path of what her mother was expected her to be. There are so many other things that can negatively influence children's psychology especially things that happen within the family arena. The fact is that whatever parents do, it will in a direct or indirect way have an effect on the child's psychology. It is important for parents to find a balance in the way of educating children to avoid some undesirable surprises.

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