

The Subversion of Social Constraints to Female Education in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses female education and punishment in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, and considers the novelists as writers who do not only advocate for the education and empowerment of the woman, particularly the girl child but also shed light on the societal punishments and limitations imposed on them. In other words, the article shows that both authors emphasize the significance of education in empowering girls and promoting personal growth while critiquing societal restrictions and punishments that girls who desire education face. To both novelists, limited access to education for the girl child, patriarchal oppression and social stigma which characterize(d) Victorian and the post independent African societies serve as containments that attempt to suppress potentially subversive feminist narratives. Using new historicist approach, and drawing from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment*, and his observations on the nature and purpose of punishment to show both novelists' destabilization of class and gender hierarchies, the work offers insights into the contentious relationship between British fin de siècle and postcolonial African societies on the one hand, and the education of the girl child on the other hand, thereby questioning the authenticity and representation of society as a disciplinary unit, leading to the conclusion that Bronte and Emecheta harbor a social and cultural agenda with focus on female education.

Keywords: social constraints, girl child, punishment, education, female

INTRODUCTION

Education in England in the nineteenth century and in post-independent African states is such a hotly debated issue because it plays a significant role in the development of cultures and in defining the socio-economic structures of these societies. As education advanced in these societies, the demand for equal opportunities and treatment for females in the educational system grew, seeking to match the opportunities available to males. Advocates for female education explained that if women gained more rights and became formally educated, their range of social, economic and political roles would expand. This coincided with legislations such as Women Disability Removal Act of 1872 in England and the various acts of compulsory and inclusive education across post independent African states allowing Victorian and post-independent African women accessibility to education. The promise of such social and by extension, economic independence spawned such anxiety, resulting in a backlash that became widely presented and propagated through a range of texts, including press articles, sermons, political speeches, pamphlets, poetry, novels and plays. Popular rhetoric portrayed the educated woman and the female student as people engaged in war against the forces of order and progress.

The "female student" became such a threatening figure that needed to be contained and suppressed by limiting her access to education or by making the education she receives unattractive. In *Jane Eyre* and *Second-Class Citizen*, female education is presented as a punishable offense, making it unappealing. Through such representation, the authors do not sell to their audience the anti-education message that education is anathema to women, but that women who pursue it may suffer but will triumph in the end. While Bronte thought it was necessary to foster substantial transformation in women through education, Emecheta emphasized the integration of women more profoundly into education aiming at upholding African values and worldviews in both African and diasporic communities.

Both novelists' involvement in discourses of female liberation and the woman's rights to education allowed them to work on nebulous categories of the relationship between the girl child, education and punishment. However, as Khalid Amine points out, Bronte, the forerunner of the Victorian art, and by extension, Emecheta, "wrote at a time when economic and political power was shifting away from a particular sex, and was being both installed and contested in the less recognized female sex" (qtd in Ronning 278). Their attempt to configure power relations between sexes outside the recognizable one was affected and defined by their desire not to preserve the hegemonic cultural policies of discouraging female education.

Over the past decade, scholars have been reading and interpreting *Jane Eyre* and *Second Class Citizen* with far greater attentiveness, both to their feminist preoccupations, impact on pedagogy, and to the theological and doctrinal controversies of Bronte's and Emecheta's eras. Some more recent studies suggest that both novelists' feminist commitments are compatible with the novels' presumably female liberation emphases. Readings by Marianne Tormohlen, Shirley Galloway, Sermin Sezer, Asha Jeffers and Amanda Witt highlight the assertion of the female protagonists' spiritual autonomy as a major component of their bildungsroman. For example, "Jane, by discerning for herself what she perceives to be God's will, effectively resists patriarchy's attempt to possess her spirit as well as her body" (Witt 39). Moreover, given the "religious and feminist resonances" of Jane's marriage, as Tormohlen and Franklin both suggest, the prominence of St. John (less a patriarchal bogeyman than a sincere over-zealous Christian) at the novel's end "balances the book" (Tormohlen 217). Asha Jeffers' reading of *Second-Class Citizen* as a "spiritually feminist bildungsroman" suggests a similarly balanced and unproblematic ending. "The novel's religious assertion of a woman's right to self-identity and its depiction of marriage as a relationship of equality," she argues, "anticipate twentieth-century African feminism" (106). In this regard, Sermin Sezer writes that "in *Second-Class Citizen* Emecheta skillfully represents the way that the African traditional power ideology which the women's movements rise against neither challenges postcolonial structures nor transforms female social power" (108).

The general idea has been for critics to show that Bronte and Emecheta combine their feminist beliefs with their religious convictions to show how women of faith could reconcile their spiritual integrity with societal and cultural norms of domesticity and femininity. But to accept that the novels embody a religious feminism that advocates the values of love and revolution risks undermining the novelists' fight and struggle towards freedom and equality. This study singles out education as an important aspect towards achieving this equity, showing how the punishment that comes with trying to achieve it serves as a strategy of frightening women out of achieving this earthly fulfillment and eventual political equality. Ultimately, Jane's and Adah's insistence upon their intellectual growth despite the punishment that comes with it enables a stinging critique of society's expectations for women. Their educational convictions are presented as the primary force behind the resistance to the punishment they receive and to the conventional female subject-positions.

Since this article offers insight into the contentious relationship between education and punishment, and between British fin de siècle society, the post independent African society, and the (un)educated female, new historicism will be used in analyzing the texts. Louise Montrose insists that the aim of new historicism is to redefine the relationship between texts and the cultural systems in which they were produced. In a much-quoted phrase, he describes new historicism as a "reciprocal concern with historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Lyu 1078). Specifically, Michel Foucault's concept of discipline and punishment will be useful. In *Discipline and Punishment*, the French philosopher, articulates that disciplinary power is a force that regulates the ideas and actions of social agents through subtle means. Discipline therefore has the ability to organize the space, time, and everyday activities of these social agents. In this light, public spectacle and torture are transformed into surveillance and the prison system to promote a generally accepted format and ideology (Bell 3). In observing the results of patriarchy as a method for "criminal" punishment for the female characters who desire education, this study shows that the idea of punishing the female student is a part of a more extensive criminal system that goes beyond sovereign institutions such as prison, schools, the military and factories.

Punishing the Female Student

Charlotte Bronte wrote *Jane Eyre* in the mid-19th century, a time when women's rights to education in England was limited. This era has been described as a period of "strict social norms, and limited opportunities for education and employment for women" (Mohammadi, 330). Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* on the

other hand, was published in the 20th century (post-independent era) when significant social changes and cultural upheavals were taking place in Nigeria and in Africa at large. During this period, women's rights were (they are still) evolving with the majority of women facing challenges related to education and personal autonomy. In both the Victorian and the post-independent African societies, education was highly valued but with limited access for women and girls. Anti-feminist propaganda in Britain and Africa regarding marriage, fertility and political representation further served as a deterrent to female education as it demonstrated the consequences of pursuing progressive aspirations, conveying the punishing ends a woman can expect in rebelling against conventional and prescribed roles established for her.

In Britain, news week articles, pamphlets, tracks and other outings often cited the conclusions of a study carried out by Neil G. Bennett, Patricia H. Craig, and David E. Bloom, professors from Yale and Harvard that "white, college-educated women born in the mid-fifties who are still single at thirty have only a twenty percent chance of marrying" (Eloise Salholz et al. 221). In Nigeria, a complex array of factors contributed to the problem of educational barriers for the girl child. Priscilla Bangura and Alice Mambo identify social norms and cultural practices that flourished immediately after Nigeria's independence, and that promoted discriminatory attitudes, devaluing the significance of girls' education and reinforcing traditional gender roles. For example, "parents were discouraged from giving their blessings to their son who intended to get married to educated women" (34). While education was not the sole factor keeping these "degreed women" from finding mates, it seemed to be the preeminent obstacle. These outings and publications set out to project doom for the woman who attempted to better themselves through education.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte shows that the girl child is fettered by a culture that refuses to accept the fact that she can be free and make room for her widening sphere. Jane suffers both physical and psychological torture from the men who rule her world, and who tie education to punishment, thereby making it a dangerous aspiration. In the opening chapter, Jane is confined to the breakfast-room where she hides to read a copy of *Bewick's History of British Birds*. As she goes through the pages, John Reed calls her from her window-seat and strikes her, forcing her to produce the book she was reading. Reed is aware of Jane's desire to be educated and decides to remind her of the social norms that prevent the female child from acquiring education. To Reed, Jane has no business with books, thereby considering her act of reading as an offense. As punishment, he throws the book at her, hits her in the head, forcing her to fall against a door. He uses the very tool she has been acquiring education through to punish her physically, a punishment that leaves her wounded sufficiently for a physician to be called. Farid Mohammadi writes that in Victorian England, "girls who aspired beyond what society offered were whipped and locked up for hours" (330). Foucault calls this type of punishment "the panopticon, where social institutions exercise power and discipline on the bodies and souls of their subjects through 'le regard'" (Bell III 11).

Jane is treated as an inmate who cannot see her guards and who does not know if she is being watched or not. It is the perpetual possibility of a thought of an observer that should encourage her to behave as prescribed by society. In this light, and as Foucault suggests, "the Panopticon and the mechanisms of power it contains extend beyond the prison and into other institutions of society (a driver who cannot be certain that she or he is not being tracked by a speed camera, for example, may choose not to speed "just in case") (Kallman and Dini 2). According to this view, behavior is conditioned by the awareness of the possibility of control.

The above scene sets the stage for subsequent pairings of education and punishment in the novel. In Gateshead, particularly at Lowood Institution, Jane receives yet more punishment in the hands of Brocklehurst. He makes an example of her for the rest of the students in the class by forcing her to stand on a stool while he identifies her as a liar. He also warns the other students not to speak to her, to "avoid her company, exclude her from [their] sports, and shut her out from [their] converse" (98). Lowood is a symbol of 19th century girl schools characterized by deprivation. "The students there lead a punishing existence: little food is offered to them there, and the bland at best is rotten or burnt" (Mohammadi 331). Brocklehurst uses different forms of punishment ranging from character deformation, physical torture and ostracism to make Jane drop out from school and assume her domestic responsibility society has reserved for her.

For the nineteenth century girl child, self-discipline was essential: they were expected to control their behavior, their speech, and their appetites as evidence of control over their desires (Law 232). The gendered skew of

behavioral expectations that Bronte relates reflect the social constraints placed to promote gender stereotypes, which is a cultural construct itself. The novel therefore reflects cultural anxieties related to the perceived biological and social roles of women, as well as the urge to control the little girls' appetite and desires (Law 234). Evidently, girls' desires were specifically targeted and contained, promising social ostracism, physical torture and limited access to resources for those who went against the norms. Bronte considers the oppression the female students are subjected to as traces and evolution of patriarchal power structures who have devastating effects on female freedom and identity.

In *Jane Eyre*, the relationship between education and punishment plays a significant role in shaping the protagonist's journey and development. Throughout the novel, education is used as a means of liberation and empowerment for Jane, while punishment serves as a tool for control and subjugation. Jane's learning environments are unaccommodating and oppressive. The Lowood School embodies the strict "disciplinary" system of Victorian society, where female students are subjected to physical and emotional abuse, with the intention of forcing them to withdraw. This punishment primarily serves to break Jane's spirit and instill in her a sense of obedience and submission. Through Jane, Bronte explores the detrimental effects of punishment when it is misused or excessively used. The character of Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster of Lowood, represents the harsh and punitive measures reserved for women who pursued education during the Victorian era. He enforces an extreme form of discipline, using the fear of punishment as a means of control over the female students. His strict adherence to religious doctrine and denial of basic comforts perpetuates injustice and suffering at the school.

The social control within educational and social institutions normalizes the view that the girls' place is within the domestic sphere. These methods of discipline along gendered lines act as a regulatory power over females, even after they leave the institution. Kate Law, who carried out an extensive study of Victorian penal institutions for juvenile females in the 19th century reveals that "girls were rewarded with prizes in the form of monetary rewards if they married and remained in a stable situation, thus endorsing the 'ideal' feminine role" (231). Victorian schools therefore played a significant role in reinforcing social norms and expectations, particularly for girls. The education system was designed to prepare girls for their future roles as wives and mothers, with a strong emphasis on domesticity and subservience. Punishment was a key tool to enforce this social control in Victorian schools. Girls were subjected to strict rules and regulations, with punishments ranging from physical chastisement to public humiliation. For example, "girls who failed to meet expectations or broke rules were often forced to wear humiliating costumes or perform menial tasks as punishment" (Law 187). This created a culture of fear and obedience, where girls were discouraged from questioning authority or challenging societal norms. The girls' self-perception and aspirations were equally affected, thereby limiting their sense of possibility and potential, making it difficult for them to imagine alternative futures or pursue careers outside the domestic sphere.

A comparable narrative of female empowerment through education can be seen in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* where Adah's experiences reflect the struggles faced by women who pursue education. The success of *Second-Class Citizen* as a literary work rest largely on Emecheta's evocation of the theme of the education of the girl child. Her desire, motivation and commitment towards educating herself and the "punishment" that came with it drove her to write the story. It is for this reason that Michael Porter thinks that "if *Second Class Citizen* were read as a novel of personal development (bildungsroman), some of the seeming inconsistencies within the text would be more fully understood" (124). In this regard, it is a novel dealing with a young African woman's gradual acquisition of knowledge as a daughter, as a wife and as an artist in a hostile native and diasporic environment. The novel presents Adah, a young Nigerian girl born into a society that devalues women, but whose focus to achieve education and succeed in life remains relentless. She nurses this ambition to attend school into a dream, feeling it so strongly into a physical manifestation that "seemed to take life, to breathe and to smile kindly at her" (19). After she makes her dream to attend school a reality she is punished by the same society and family she intends to save from the effects of gender discrimination, suffering multiple canings, insults and injustices in the process.

In school, Adah suffers violence because she wants to be educated, just like the other children. One day, though innocent, the headmaster gets angry with her laughter and decides to cane her with the help of some male students. In the process, she bites one of the boys who wants to carry her on his back. After this event, people start calling

her “the Igbo tigress” at school (15). “Some of her Yoruba friends used to ask her what human flesh tasted like, because “You Igbos used to eat people, didn’t you?” (15-16). Though one can sense that there is an ethnic conflict between the Yoruba and the Igbo even among children, the target is Adah and her strong desire to acquire education. Though the insults come both from male and female students, it can be argued that these are all manifestations of what the society stands for, where the girls themselves are part of their own victimization. As a child, she has to force herself into the classroom of a friendly neighboring teacher before she is finally enrolled in school. This is so because her parents (especially her mother) have doubts about the wisdom of sending girls to school, no doubt they did not insist for her birth to be recorded.

Adah, even at a very young age, is very conscious of her preferences. She understands that working hard in school would give her better opportunities in life. On one occasion, Adah needs just two shillings for the entrance exams of the school of her dreams (16), and when she is given two shillings to buy meat from the market, she decides to keep the money for the entrance examinations. At home, she is beaten, a punishment she takes with delight. Though her cousin canes her for neither bringing meat nor money home, she knows that she is being punished because she wants to write the Methodist Girls’ High School entrance examination. She has no other option. Her cousin canes her for not bringing back the money home, but whatever she experiences, she is still happy, because she has earned two shillings (17). This experience clearly shows her determination to have better education and in future challenge the patriarchal practices of her own locality. When she tells the headmaster that she will stay for the entrance examination, he looks at her physical appearance and does not believe in her. The headmaster’s reactions make it obvious that the existence of a girl school does not automatically validate society’s acceptance of the education of the girl child. Though at a moment she thinks of the possibility that she could not be able to pay the fees of the high school, she immediately recollects herself, believing that she would get a high grade in the examination to gain scholarship (17). As she prepares to take this examination, the thought that she might be punished for it keeps propping into her mind. For example, she fears that her cousin Vincent, who often canes her each time she talks of furthering her education might punish her if she breaks the news to him (18). She finally resolves that, as long as she is not asking him for money, and as long as she does the household chores, all will be fine. When she finally gets the scholarship (she is one of the first five children) (18), then it is obvious that punishment cannot cause one to abandon his or her ambitions and dreams.

Through Adah, Emecheta engages in the girl child’s struggle for education and the price of defiance. The novel becomes an illustration of the struggles faced by many African girls who dared to pursue education in the 1970s. Adah’s desire for knowledge and self-improvement is met with brutal resistance from her family and community, who view her aspirations as a threat to traditional norms and values. The violence she suffers is a stark reminder of the risks that many girls face when they challenge the status quo and seek to empower themselves through education.

As a result of a first-rate performance at the school-leaving examinations, the heroine is able to procure a job as a librarian at the American consulate in Lagos—a job which easily brings her the comforts of middle-class life. During this same period, she meets Francis Obi, a young student of accounting whom she agrees to marry because she thinks he will provide some necessary protection, support and, above all, love for her in Lagos. Looking at Adah’s salary as a convenient means of financial support, Francis (with his parents’ approval) decides to go and continue his studies in Britain, leaving Adah behind. This thwarts Adah’s plans because she wanted to use her marriage as an escape route to further her education, away from family constraints. Through this marriage, Emecheta reveals the social drives of marriage, which underpin the ambivalent conditions that result in women’s subordination to their men.

The conflicting process begins the moment Adah travels to meet Francis in England. The marriage becomes the most significant roadblock to Adah achieving her goals of furthering her education and becoming a writer. Francis is not supportive of her dreams, he is abusive, and she is continuously pregnant and/or taking care of her children. Francis fails his accounting examination multiple times, and the narrator notes that he feels like a failure and wishes to make Adah feel like one as well. He does not wish to have a wife who is more ambitious and successful than he is. Worse, she realizes that Francis, who had always been dependent on her, has become even more so and more manipulative in England. His life-style is now characterized by gross antisocial behavior, a feeling of inferiority, laziness, and utter irresponsibility. Adah tries at first to support the family and take care of the home but it also becomes clear to her that Francis’ irresponsibility is in direct proportion to his desire to bear

more children. When Adah confronts him with this obvious domestic problem, Francis becomes defensive and brutal. The final clash occurs when, after the birth of their fifth child (at a time when Adah is barely twenty-two), Francis spitefully burns the manuscript of Adah's first novel.

The burning of the manuscript betrays the explosive nature of the menfolk in their hatred for the rise in status of the opposite sex. Suzuki Graves asserts that "Adah can hardly believe that he would do a thing like this, and this explains her mood and reaction when she learns of the news that the manuscript has been destroyed" (201). To Adah, this is impossible because she does not see any reason in Francis' act. "What he has done is unheard of and where he got the idea must not be of this earth" (Graves 103). For her husband, the opportunity has come to stop his wife's ambition of acquiring more knowledge and rising above him in social status. With the manuscript now out of the way, Francis still stands a better position of staying above Adah.

Punishment as a Catalyst for Intellectual Growth and Empowerment

In line with Michael Walzer's view that Foucault's development of the relationship between education and punishment lacks practical action to regulate discipline, this section shows that to Bronte and Emecheta, disciplinary power produces a critical distance which if not checked, stretches into infinity causing the enterprise to collapse. The relationship between education and punishment in *Jane Eyre* and *Second-Class Citizen* is complex but integral to the novels' overarching themes. While punishment, through Foucauldian judge, which in this case include the teacher-judge, the husband-judge, the educator-judge and the society-judge, may initially serve to control and suppress the protagonists, it inadvertently becomes the catalyst for their intellectual growth and eventual empowerment. Because education acts as a powerful tool for personal transformation and self-liberation, and serving as a control measure, withstanding punishment and going through school prepares Jane and Adah for the tasks of challenging societal norms and finding their own voices.

While at Lockwood, Jane forms a friendship with Helen Burns, a fellow student, who encourages her intellectual pursuits. Helen's influence introduces Jane to the power of education as a means of personal transformation and resilience. She teaches Jane about endurance, forgiveness, and the importance of intellectual and moral growth. This connection between education and personal development demonstrates that punishment can unknowingly lead to positive outcomes. When the two first meet, Jane sees Helen as someone wiser and as an "elevated soul", causing Jane to develop an admiration for her. Jane puts Helen on a pedestal; she becomes the teacher whom she looks up to, and Helen meets her expectations by providing answers to all her questions.

One important aspect that Helen teaches Jane is how to deal with punishment. Jane finds out that a particular teacher treats Helen quite cruelly, and that she accepts her punishments in silence. When Jane asks her why she does not complain, Helen answers that if she does not do so, she will be expelled. Helen understands that the male teachers' agenda is to discourage women through punishment, and refuses to fall a victim. She thinks that what awaits her after her studies is far more rewarding than running away from punishment. The wisdom in Helen's words captivates Jane and, even though she disagrees with her friend, she is fascinated by her vision of the world: "Still I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light invisible to my eyes. I suspected she might be right and I wrong; but I would not ponder the matter deeply" (64). Here, the link between punishment, education and individualization is created. In Foucault's words, "discipline makes individuals" and functions as a means of producing plain subjectivity. As he puts it, "each individual, wherever he may find himself, subject to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements because disciplinary society is normalized" (qtd in Deacon, 186). At this point, Jane has already taken the decision to withstand punishment in order to gain a more rewarding future. When we see her enduring her punishment, then we know she is bent on seeing that her individualism developed, through education, despite the punishment.

In one of the punishment scenes, while standing on the stool, Jane feels embarrassed and sad as a result of the inhuman treatment he received from her teacher. However, when Helen stares at her, she gains strength. Her eyes are described as being inspired with a "strange light that provokes an extraordinary sensation in Jane sending rays through her, and this spirit bore her up" (76). Her reaction to Helen's gaze symbolizes her connection to the teachings of endurance and perseverance. Jane clearly sees something else in Helen's eyes than what a simple friend would see.

Jane later realizes that she is being caged in social conventions which she is supposed to follow, not question or challenge. To her, this situation is temporary, and when she starts to form her own opinion, judging other women who behave like objects, then we know she is ready to face her fears. Speaking of Rochester's girlfriend, she says "she was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own." (162). Jane adopts a patronizing attitude towards this woman from an intellectual perspective, speaking of how she repeats phrases from books and never showing her own opinion. Jane now is a woman having her own identity and mind, is independent, speaks her mind and forms her own thoughts thanks to the education she acquired.

Likewise, in *Second-Class Citizen*, the punishment Adah goes through enables her to assert her uniqueness. Upon arriving in England, she is subjected to physical violence and psychological abuse by Francis. Already having two children, Adah is concerned about not having another one at that moment, but as the narrator relates, Francis has passed reasoning and their sexual intercourse hints at sexual violation. Adah's ideas and feelings about sexuality are not heard except for her desire of not falling pregnant again. As Sukanya Ghosh claims, being raised in a society where there is male supremacy, "Francis accuses Adah of her frigidity rather than trying to work for a mutually shared sexuality...and the narration of Adah-Francis reunion in London does not connote reestablishment of respectful spousal relations" (210).

Francis continuously "punishes" Adah, making her life in England difficult since nobody would like to hire a pregnant woman. After having found a position in a library, Adah manages to hide her pregnancy while she works, but she has to leave the job when she gives birth to the child. As things get more complicated for her, she wants to go for family planning after having the fourth child, and is sure that Francis will not respect her decision. Having lost several well-paid jobs because of her pregnancies, Adah is determined to prevent another pregnancy so that she can work. Due to the fact that Francis is, in Adah's words, "Nigerian through through" she has to do it without letting him know. But when Francis realizes that Adah is trying to avoid a possible pregnancy, he becomes violent and hysterical. Adah reaches a turning point, deciding to stand up against the patriarchal figure who has dominated her life.

Edmund Nwokocho wonders why Adah, despite "achieving recognition and status by the birth of at least one male child, is still not fulfilled and ultimately accorded greater respect relative to her counterparts who do not achieve the same feat" (qtd in Gil-Naveira 238). When she understands that there is no hope in the marriage, deprived of birth control and belittled by the letters Francis sends to their families in Nigeria, Adah understands that Francis will never change for the better, and opts for a life without him. Realizing his wife's readiness to move to a new location, he feels threatened and pushes his punishment to a highest level by burning the manuscript of her first novel, which she calls her brainchild.

The burning of the manuscript encourages Adah even more to leave Francis, who insists that in their tradition there is nothing like divorce. Francis mentions how his mother did not leave her father despite having been beaten for years. Not constrained by this tradition, Adah feels powerful enough to get a divorce so as to lead a dignifying life. She no longer believes that a "complete woman" is one married with children. Therefore, Francis's constant psychological abuse ignites her desire to live without him. She has yearned for equality in marriage and in sharing the responsibilities of their family, but Francis' reluctance and constant abuse lead her to take the necessary steps and relieve herself from the confinements of her family and society.

Adah's desire for education is motivated by a deep-seated trust in the transformative power of knowledge. To Emecheta, education and the pursuit of it is a powerful means of empowerment for girls and women. Through it, the girls are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to challenge traditional norms and expectations, and forge their own paths in life. The punishment for girls who seek education should not stop or undermine this empowerment, because if it does, it reinforces the notion that girls are inferior to boys and that their primary role is to conform to societal expectations.

Emecheta therefore portrays education as a liberating force for the post-independent African woman. Ada, like many other educated women, does not think like the traditional African women, and her desire to pursue her education, this time through writing, cannot be stopped. Through Adah, the novelist emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, independence, subjectivity, and of course the pursuit of knowledge. Adah's intelligence and

education become the key factors that differentiate her and define her existence. Her intellectual capabilities allow her to challenge societal norms and expectations, as seen in her reactions when faced with discrimination and injustice. For example, after Adah leaves her husband, the way she perceives blackness as an identity marker also changes. While at the Mansions, Adah is looking after her children and keeping them silent, not to disturb the neighbors. Despite her efforts, one of the early dwellers of the Mansions warns her in a threatening tone:

‘Look!’ he thundered, not bothering to introduce himself or excuse himself. ‘Look, I don’t mind your color!’ Adah jumped. Color? What color was he talking about; she had never seen Mr. Small before: what color he was referring to? (128)

Adah is amazed to hear Mr. Small mention her color, and looks at the color of the back of her hand, and says “well yes”. Though Mr. Smith walks away unchallenged, Adah makes it obvious that she has not been thinking of her color, but living in England makes her color conscious. The feeling of happiness and liberty she has been experiencing since she got divorced from Francis, and her finding a place of her own to live in, should not be disturbed by her neighbors.

The abodes Adah inhabits such as the Council flats, the room in the slum and the ruined flat in a wealthy neighborhood cannot be considered as proper homes where people can easily have a sense of belonging, but thanks to her ability to adapt to the new situations, Adah can make her life better in England. “One of the methods she had found very helpful in securing friendship in England was to pretend to be stupid. You see, if you were black and stupid, you were conforming to what society expected of you” (30). Adah, by experience, knows that playing the part of the stupid never fails to gain the sympathies of the Europeans who think they are superior. When she asks for the Smalls’ help to light the coalite, from their cynical remarks Adah feels that they consider her as illiterate. However, the truth is, she has always lived in Nigeria where the average daily temperature is at the eighties Fahrenheit so she did not need to use the coalite. Her neighbors are not aware of her personal history, and Adah sees no point in explaining to them that in her country she attended a colonial school with a standard equaling the best girls’ school in London. Ironically, she works as a civil servant in their country placing her in the middle-class. To avoid getting into problems, she accepts her role as a stupid woman, thereby avoiding drawing attention, maintaining relations and navigating the complexities of her new environment.

Adah desires independence, and if combined with individual hopes, separate her from the African diasporic woman in general. She declares to her husband that the utmost hope is to save others through the writing of African novels. This signal of ambition, hopes and a plan to get what she wishes indicates her continuous desire for independence. She refuses to settle for what life serves her, opting for self-improvement through writing. Her education takes a significant turn when she becomes a writer which permits her to gain self-confidence, respect and recognition, new relations. By opting to shape the minds of other young women Adah gains a sense of authority, autonomy and empowerment, thereby challenging power dynamics.

Altogether, the experiences of Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* and Jane in *Jane Eyre* demonstrate that punishment can be a catalyst for intellectual growth and empowerment. Despite the oppressive forces that sought to silence and subjugate them, both Adah and Jane found ways to resist, rebel, and ultimately, thrive. The punishments they endured, though painful and unjust, served as a spark that ignited their desire for knowledge, self-awareness, and independence. As both protagonists navigated the complexities of their respective worlds, they discovered the transformative power of education, self-reflection, and determination, emerging as strong, intelligent, and resilient individuals, capable of challenging the status quo and forging their own paths. Ultimately, their stories serve as testaments to the human spirit's capacity for growth, resilience, and triumph in the face of adversity.

CONCLUSION

In *Jane Eyre* and *Second-Class Citizen*, the relationship between education, punishment, and female liberation is explored through the experiences and growth of the respective protagonists, Jane and Adah. As mistreated children, Jane and Adah find solace in books and education through which they gain knowledge and develop a sense of self-worth, empowering them to eventually assert their independence and demand equality in their relationships. Their narratives reveal striking similarities in the ways that societal expectations and patriarchal norms can limit the girl child's access to education. Both Jane and Adah face violence and oppression as a result

of their desire for knowledge, highlighting the ways in which women's empowerment is often seen as a threat to traditional power structures. In Charlotte Brontë's Victorian England, women's roles were narrowly defined, and education was seen as a luxury for females. The societal norms of the time emphasized women's domestic duties and reinforced their subordination to men. Jane Eyre's struggles against these norms, particularly her desire for education and independence, reflect Brontë's critique of the societal constraints placed on women during this period. In Buchi Emecheta's post-colonial Nigeria, women's roles were also defined by societal expectations, although in different ways. The legacy of colonialism and traditional patriarchal norms intersected to limit women's access to education and opportunities. Above all, the relationship between education, punishment, and female liberation in *Jane Eyre* and *Second-Class Citizen* is complex and multi-faceted. Education serves as a catalyst for the protagonists' personal growth and assertion of independence, while punishment highlights the societal expectations and limitations placed on women. Jane's and Adah's journey towards liberation is one of self-discovery, challenging societal norms, and finding empowerment through resistance.

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