

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Writing Prejudices argues that recent critical attempts to undermine prejudice through education in general, and literary studies in particular, have often failed because they have not taken into account: (1) the different forms of prejudice; (2) the role played by homophobia in racism and sexism; (3) the structure of what Lacan calls symbolic castration; and (4) the unconscious foundations of cultural formations.¹ In order to address these deficiencies, I will examine manifestations of racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia in literary works from three different periods. After I develop a differential model of prejudices, I will then show how distinct modes of oppression feed off each other and the diverse ways that cultural critics can work to undermine these systems of oppression.

The fundamental cycle of prejudices that I will examine is based on the homophobic rejection of same-sex desires, which often results in the racist projection of unwanted libidinal impulses onto culturally debased Others. Within this structure, the dominant social order equates homosexual desire with a loss of linguistic control and a breakdown of the symbolic structure of sexual difference. In order to overcome this sense of symbolic confusion, subjects force others to submit to a sexist form of symbolic castration.

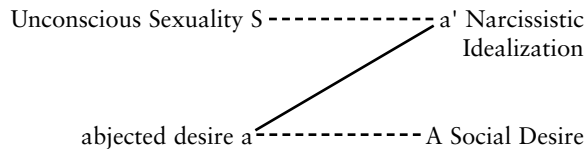
For Lacan, linguistic castration is defined by the fact that human subjects must submit themselves and their desires to a symbolic discourse that alienates them from their natural bodies and perceptions.² This fundamental form of alienation is unconsciously experienced as a subjective state of enslavement in which one's body is mediated and transformed by the desire of the social Other. Furthermore, I will argue throughout this study that one way subjects attempt to escape feelings of linguistic, social, and political submission is by subjecting others to their will and by projecting their repressed desires onto debased Others.³

Many forms of prejudice are structured by this double movement of the projection of repressed sexuality onto a cultural Other that is followed by

the attempt to force the Other to submit to the symbolic law of castration. In perverse forms of racism and sexism, women and minorities are first attacked for being hypersexual and linguistically inadequate, and then they are punished and compelled to subject their desires to the dominant social order. Perverse subjects thus link sexual transgression to discourse and punishment in an attempt to master the trauma of linguistic loss and lack by repeating the scene of castration in erotic symbolic scenarios.⁴ These subjects use symbolic representation as a way of translating and displacing the initial trauma of language onto different social relations by producing a debased and devalorized object. We shall see how this displacement and projection of linguistic loss plays an essential role in many forms of prejudice.⁵

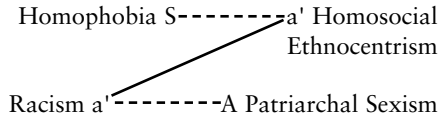
LACANIAN PSYCHOCULTURAL STRUCTURES

In order to trace the ways that same-sex desires and linguistic castration are repressed and projected onto debased cultural Others, I will be returning to Lacan's theory of subjectivity as it is represented in his schema L (*Ecrits* 193–196):



Following Freud, Lacan posits that the initial state of being for every subject (S) involves an unmediated access to the real of bodily enjoyment and a freedom from any form of social regulation.⁶ In the second stage of this structure, this original mode of polymorphous desire is replaced by an ideal image of pleasure (a') that supports the subject's desire for unity and identity. In order to explain this narcissistic structure of imaginary identity, Lacan posits that the subject first gains a sense of being a unified and separate self by seeing the unified and complete body of the other. By looking into a mirror or at a similar person, subjects gain access to an imaginary representation of their own body. The third phase of this logic designates the fact that all modes of desire are transformed and mediated by the symbolic discourse of law and language (A). By claiming that "the desire of the subject is the desire of the Other," Lacan posits that human sexuality is determined by this level of social reality and symbolic castration.⁷ Finally, the object (a) designates the refusal of desire to be completely regulated by either imaginary narcissism or symbolic sexual difference. This object (a) represents all of the forms of sexuality and identity that the dominant social order abjects and excludes.

This model of subjectivity can be used to develop a psychosexual cultural schema of interrelated prejudices:



In the movement of this structure, the cultural rejection of same-sex desire (S) is supported by the production of an imaginary mode of homosocial male bonding (a'). Due to the fact that homosexual desires can be experienced as an intrusion of an uncontrollable form of unconscious and illicit sexual enjoyment, homosocial relationships create a sense of imaginary identity through the idealization of the same gender and ethnicity. This ethnocentric idealization of the bonds between men is, in turn, anchored in a sexist form of patriarchy (A) that uses women as the receptacles for men's repressed desire for other men. However, since there is always a residue of homosexual desire (a) that persists in every subject's unconscious, this desire is projected onto other cultures and people who have been socially placed in positions of abjection and amorality (a). What in part defines this racist abjection of the out-group is that they are considered to be the polar opposite of the idealized homosocial group.⁸

In the literary texts that I will be examining, we will continually encounter this psychocultural structure of prejudice. A paradigmatic example of this cycle of prejudice can be found in the literature and history of exploration. In a wide array of texts documenting the first encounters between sailing Europeans and native populations, we find that the men who take a voyage together in order to explore or colonize another culture are often forced to deal with their desires for each other. In order to fight against these same-sex desires, these men perform a series of hypermasculine rituals. However, once they land on the island that they are sailing to, they project their own repressed desires onto the natives, which not only frees the explorers of their own troubling desires, but also helps to justify the subjection of the "dark Other." I will posit that this movement from homophobic homosociality to a racist form of projected sexuality is inherent in the very structure of Western culture.

PSYCHOANALYTIC STRUCTURES OF PREJUDICE

My understanding of the psychoanalytic structures of prejudice have been greatly influenced by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's account of racism, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. In *The Anatomy of Prejudice*, Young-Bruehl observes that most theorists of prejudice have employed a single

explanatory model to describe such diverse phenomena as anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, and homophobia.⁹ In order to counter this theoretical flaw, Young-Bruehl identifies three different forms of prejudice, which she labels hysterical racism, obsessional anti-Semitism, and narcissistic sexism. I will employ this psychoanalytic structure of prejudice, but I will modify it by connecting it to the Freudian distinction between psychosis, neurosis, and perversion.

Through this theory, I will argue that hysterical racism is most often based on a psychotic foreclosure of same-sex desire, while narcissistic sexism can be best explained as a perverse attempt at forcing all sexual desire and linguistic castration into a symbolic sadomasochistic structure. I will also argue that Young-Bruehl's conception of obsessional anti-Semitism can be applied to a neurotic form of homosocial ethnocentrism. One of the central, defining distinctions between these different modes of prejudice is their respective primary modes of defense—projection (psychosis), repression (neurosis), or denial (perversion)—against the threatening aspects of sexual enjoyment and the loss of linguistic control.

In racism, as Young-Bruehl explains, one finds a hysterical projection of unwanted desires onto a debased out-group:

When they are prejudiced . . . they have projected their desires onto the objects of prejudice, [and] the others have become the image of their forbidden or frustrated desires. But this means that the others, while classified as forbidden, are also alluring. (229)

In this structure, the hysterical racist projects his or her own unconscious fears and desires onto an abjected cultural Other. The result of this process is that this Other becomes a symbol of hypersexuality and aggression.¹⁰

According to Young-Bruehl, in order for hysterical subjects to control and contain their projected unconscious, they need to enforce strict rules concerning marriage, social hierarchy, and political power. The domestic Other or outsider must be contained in a fixed location or position within the house or nation.¹¹ Young-Bruehl adds that the ultimate threat to this form of social control is intermarriage, where an outsider becomes associated with an insider:

The quintessential act of transgression is intermarriage between the higher and the lower. Marriage represents equality for the partner and thus destroys the main theme of the hysterical character's prejudice—"They have a place and they must stay in it." (224)

This fear of intermarriage is therefore in part determined by the desire to maintain social inequality and the need to keep the Other in the role of the repository of projected desires.

One limitation of Young-Bruehl's theory of hysterical racism is that it does not take into account more severe forms of pathology. Taken to its logical extreme, hysterical racism can result in a psychotic form of prejudice that depends on the delusional projection of unconscious desires onto a debased Other. Thus, Freud's fundamental hypothesis concerning psychosis is that the paranoid subject rejects his own (homosexual) desires and projects those feelings onto an external Other:

The most striking characteristic of symptom-formation in paranoia is the process which deserves the name of projection. An internal perception is suppressed, and instead, its content, after undergoing a certain degree of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception. ("Psychoanalytic Notes" 169)

This psychotic model is thus based on the confusion between rejected sexual desires and the perception of the desire of the Other. For psychotic subjects, the Other represents in the real their own unconscious wishes and fears.¹²

Moreover, Freud centers this theory of psychotic projection on a homophobic foreclosure of same-sex desires. In Freud's model, all forms of psychosis are related to the projection and transformation of the proposition "I (a man) love him." In the case of the delusion of persecution, this fundamental phrase is transformed into: "I do not love him—I hate him" ("Notes" 165). This second phrase is then inverted through the process of projection: "He hates (persecutes) me" (166). This same process of rejection and projection is evident in erotomania, where Freud posits that the gender of the love-object is switched and the statement "I do not love him—I love her" is transformed into the phrase: "I notice that she loves me" (166). Likewise, in delusional jealousy, the declaration of same-sex desire is inverted and reversed through a changing of the gender of the speaker: "It is not I who love the man—she loves him" (167). According to Freud, every form of paranoia is thus based on a fundamental rejection of same-sex desire.

What determines psychotic racism and homophobia is the way that the rejection of same-sex desire is linked to the foreclosure of the symbolic regulation of sexuality and subjectivity. As Lacan argues, the psychotic subject forecloses the social mediation of desire (Name-of-the-Father) and the complex of castration, and the result of this foreclosure or radical rejection is a return in the real of the rejected symbolic Other.¹³ Lacan thus downplays the homosexual grounding of this structure in order to emphasize the heterosexual role of the paternal metaphor (the superego) and the resolution of the Oedipus complex. In other terms, since the social control of desire within a patriarchal system (Name-of-the-Father) is dependent on the cultural rejection of homosexuality, same-sex desire is perceived to represent a threat to the dominant social order.¹⁴

Linked to this primary form of prejudice, we find the structure of what Young-Bruehl calls obsessional anti-Semitism. In this mode of prejudice, a subjective stress on assimilation and conformity results in a fear of losing control to authority figures and the penetrating Other. For obsessional anti-Semites, “the Jew” represents the scum and dirt that they are trying to clean away. However, since for the obsessional subject, everything is always the Other’s fault, the Other comes to symbolize both the powerless poor and the powerful rich (215). Thus, National Socialists believed both that the Jews controlled all the banks and that they were no different from animals and dirt (215).

Young-Bruehl argues that the fundamental fear of these obsessional anti-Semites is being passive in front of an all-powerful Other (218–219). This fear of passivity is centered on the double threat posed by castration and by the Other’s enjoyment. For both the eruption of uncontrollable sexual enjoyment (*jouissance*) and castration threaten the obsessional subject’s sense of bodily and mental control. For Lacan, the obsessional subject sacrifices his or her own sexual enjoyment in order to perform and work for a powerful Other, but he or she can receive sexual pleasure only by transgressing the law of the Other.¹⁵ For this subject, it is always the Other who is having all of the enjoyment and pleasure.

According to Jacques-Alain Miller, this question of the enjoyment of the Other is essential to the understanding of all forms of prejudice:

Why does the Other remain Other? What is the cause of our hatred for him, for our hatred of him in his very being? It is hatred of the enjoyment of the Other.

This would be the most general formula of the modern racism that we are witnessing today: a hatred of the particular way the Other enjoys . . . It is located on the level of the tolerance and intolerance toward the enjoyment of the Other, the Other as he who essentially steals my own enjoyment.¹⁶

Miller’s argument here allows us to see the connection between prejudice and sexual enjoyment; however, this theory fails to distinguish between the hysterical projection of one’s own rejected sexual enjoyment and the obsessional fear that the Other is stealing our sexual pleasure.

I will expand Young-Bruehl’s theory of obsessional anti-Semitism by equating it with the general structure of ethnocentrism, for central to the celebration of ethnic sameness and the debasement of cultural difference is an obsessional investment in imaginary forms of social homogeneity and national unity. In this structure, the presence of foreigners in one’s home culture represents a threat to bodily unity and a menace of bodily penetration.

In order to ward off these feelings of vulnerability, obsessional ethnocentrists develop homosocial bonds of racial and sexual sameness.¹⁷

One way that this ethnocentric desire for cultural unity and sameness can manifest itself is in the final form of prejudice that Young-Bruehl discusses: sexism. In the narcissistic structure of sexism, the prejudiced subject's fear of internal disintegration and loss of identity causes a desire for sameness and a rejection of all forms of difference (230–38). For the narcissistic male sexist, all inferior subjects are feminine or feminized, and in order to work against sexual and cultural difference, the narcissist forms peer groups or gangs that turn the "I" into a "we" (235). In this structure, homosocial male bonding protects against the recognition of sexual difference.

I will argue that narcissistic sexism is most often structured by a perverse form of subjectivity rather than a neurotic mode. This distinction is crucial because one cannot examine or treat perverse and neurotic subjects in the same way.¹⁸ In perverse sado-masochism, as defined by Freud, the essential features include the unconscious denial of sexual difference, the formation of a fetish, the rigid distinction between active masculinity and passive femininity, and the negation of castration.¹⁹ Lacan adds that perverse subjects seek to force all of their sexual enjoyment into the Symbolic Other in order to find an absolute law of desire (*Four Concepts* 183). Thus, in order to fully symbolize their sexuality, perverse subjects need to wear uniforms, play out social scenarios, depict social roles, and transgress the various forms of political authority and law. Lacan posits that in these perverse scenes, subjects are attempting to master their subjection to language and culture by transforming symbolic castration into an erotic relationship. Moreover, by sexualizing symbolic castration and different forms of masochistic subjection, the subject is able to transform the threatening aspects of sexuality into a symbolic binary code. From this viewpoint, cross-dressing, hypermasculinity, and hyperfemininity can be seen as perverse attempts to symbolize sexual trauma and difference. While these modes of gender transformation may appear to subvert different forms of sexism, Lacan's account of perversion ultimately shows that these types of sexual masquerade and mimicry repeat and reinforce the strict symbolic codes that they ostensibly try to undermine.

In the last section of this work, I will examine the ways that this perverse form of prejudice dominates in our current postmodern culture. Both postmodern and perverse modes of subjectivity are determined by a stress on the commodification of desire, subjective division, the social construction of gender and the body, symbolic role-playing, and the intense fear of bodily fragmentation. By examining two novels by Toni Morrison, we will see how the postmodern idealization of whiteness is not only an aesthetic or a racial formation but also has clear sexual and economic roots. Through her

descriptions of advertising, children's toys, and literature, Morrison ties postmodern capitalism to the circulation of desire in a color-coded structure. Furthermore, we learn in Morrison's text that postmodern capitalism not only works by producing new desires and new objects for consumption, it also serves to produce these desires within a racist and ethnocentric order.

The "beauty industry" is the prime example of the way that global capitalism has linked itself to a cycle of prejudices. In this postmodern structure, the homosocial and ethnocentric celebration of whiteness and heterosexuality is tied to a mass-mediated form of racial desire. Morrison shows that all modes of representation (books, toys, movies, billboards, stores, magazines, newspapers, etc.) in our current culture tend to idealize the desire for whiteness and devalue the presence of blackness. Her text thus relates the internalization of racism to the power of postmodern capitalism in the shaping of unconscious subjective desires and fears.

In the final chapter, I will use this model of prejudices to examine the ways that literary texts both facilitate and challenge diverse modes of oppression. While I will connect these different forms of prejudice together, I will also stress the importance of understanding their differences. These theoretical distinctions are crucial to the work against prejudice because different forms of discrimination require different types of remedies. For example, the perverse form of sexism cannot be undermined by educational strategies that merely stress the need to correct the wrong ideas that these men have about women. Such a technique will fail because perverse subjects will take any new knowledge, no matter how enlightened, and submit it to their binary way of thinking. Similarly, educational strategies opposing hysterical racism often do not work because they do not push subjects to examine their unconscious fears and desires. Thus the link between homophobia and racism requires that any attempt to fight against hysterical racism must also address questions of cultural and personal homophobia. Furthermore, since hysterical racism plays on class and ethnic hierarchies, the unconscious desire for social inequality should be addressed along with a quest for greater social and economic justice.

The question of economic inequality also plays a crucial role in the work against obsessional anti-Semitism and homosocial ethnocentrism. The obsessional subject's demonization of the Other is often motivated out of a double fear of bodily penetration and a loss of social and economic status. These subjective fears and desires must be explored and addressed in order to undermine the obsessional need for male bonding and racial narcissism.

LITERARY MODELS OF PREJUDICE

In order to examine how this cycle of prejudice has been circulated from one generation to the next, *Writing Prejudices* will look at three different Western literary periods. By highlighting the continuities and discontinuities in these written texts, I hope to show how the theme of prejudice has been a central motif throughout the history of Western literature. However, I also want to argue that the structures and forms of prejudices change as we move from the Early Modern to the Modern and Postmodern literary periods. By starting with a consideration of three texts by Shakespeare, I will lay the foundations for our own culture of prejudices in the Early Modern Period.

This exploration of Early Modern prejudices begins with chapter 2, where I interpret Shakespeare's *Othello* in order to articulate the differences and connections among racism, sexism, homophobia, and ethnocentrism. One of my central arguments will be that Iago gets Othello to hate himself (internalized racism) and his wife (narcissistic sexism) by conjuring up a strong sense of same-sex desire and homophobia. As in Freud's classic theory on homosexuality, paranoia, and jealousy, Othello represses his own same-sex desires and projects them onto Desdemona, who becomes a symbol of sexual excess. Homophobia thus fuels the other modes of prejudice in the play.

In chapter 3, the relationship among homophobia, sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism are explored in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. Through the homosocial celebration of white beauty, the poet of these sonnets attempts to hide his same-sex desires and to debase his dark female Other in a sexist and racist way. The poet not only seeks to reject his homosexuality but also tries to project linguistic loss and lack onto his "dark Other." These sonnets thus become essential in our examination of the role played by linguistic castration in diverse forms of prejudice.

In chapter 4, I complete this study of early modern prejudice by examining *The Tempest* as a text of ideological colonization. I posit that in many voyages of discovery, there is a rejection of same-sex desires that are then projected onto the native population. In this play, Caliban becomes the object of Prospero's culture's repressed homosexuality. In order for men to fend off the feelings that they have for each other in this culture, they not only develop this form of racial homophobia, but they also seek to celebrate an idealized mode of heterosexuality and homosociality. By tying the cycle of prejudices to acts of colonial exploitation, I will display some of the political and historical consequences of our cultural homophobia and racism.

After this examination of early modern prejudices, I turn my attention to the nineteenth-century literature of colonialization. In chapter 5, I interpret

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a veiled critique of slavery that links together homophobia, racism, sexism, and homosociality within a colonial context. For Victor Frankenstein, the monster becomes the depository of all of his repressed same-sex desires and cultural fears. Moreover, the monster presents himself as a victim of prejudice who seeks out a color-blind society. Shelley's text helps us to connect the structure of prejudice to the psychology of both the victim and victimizer of oppression.

In chapter 6, I conclude this analysis of nineteenth-century colonialist prejudices by reading Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as an example of an obsessional form of homophobia. Conrad's homophobic panic and obsessional discourse is centered on a rhetorical use of irony and other distancing techniques that serve to give the reader and the writer a sense of ego mastery by repressing all forms of sexual and cultural Otherness. This mode of discourse is also connected to the dominant types of literary criticism that project onto cultural texts diverse social and cultural problems that serve to divorce personal responsibility from cultural analysis.

In the last section of this work, I examine two African-American texts in order to discuss the ways that victims of prejudice resist or internalize the forms of oppression that they are subjected to. In Chapter 7, I read Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* to articulate the cycle of prejudices within an African-American context. Morrison's text also allows us to formulate the relationship between class structure and distinct forms of subjective prejudice.

In the final chapter, I interpret Morrison's *Beloved* as a postmodern slave narrative that asks all Americans to deal with the parts of our past that we continue to repress. By developing Žižek's theory of the national unconscious, I articulate a psychoanalytic theory of communal healing. This psychoanalytic cultural criticism allows us to determine ways to overcome the different forms of prejudice that I will be analyzing.

PSYCHOANALYTIC CULTURAL CRITICISM

Throughout this work, I will be stressing a psychoanalytic form of cultural criticism that links subjective modes of prejudice to larger cultural forces. One of the major issues that I will be addressing is the reason subjects may masochistically enjoy the social and ideological forces that oppress them. Slavoj Žižek's theory of ideological enjoyment will be employed in order to analyze this enjoyment of subjection and the many ways that subjective desires serve to reinforce dominant social ideologies (*Sublime* 30–53).

For Žižek, a subject's fantasy life and unconscious desire are often ideologically determined. In fact, one of the most powerful means of containing

and controlling subjectivity and desire is the production of socially determined private lives. According to Žižek, society uses the subject's irrational and incomprehensible desire in order to get him or her to submit to an irrational and incomprehensible social order. Instead of opposing the moralistic superego to the amoral id, Žižek insists that the two often work together:

This regressive, blind, 'automatic' behavior, which bears all the signs of the Id, far from liberating us from the pressures of the existing social order, adheres perfectly to the demands of the Superego, and is therefore already enlisted in the service of the social order. (*Tarrying* 16)

In other terms, society controls subjects by containing and producing their irrational desires and enjoyments. This theory of masochistic ideological enjoyment helps us to understand why victims of prejudice and oppression may unconsciously accept their states of subjection.

Following Althusser, Žižek claims that ideological enjoyment is realized through externalized actions and not internalized convictions: "The illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what people are doing. What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion" (*Sublime* 32). Žižek's argument here is that social reality and ideology are structured by a series of fictions and deceptions that people blindly follow in their everyday actions.

This conception of the fictional nature of social reality undermines most attempts to counter forms of prejudice by simply pointing to the distortions on which they are based. As Žižek posits, a social system that is founded on deception cannot be transformed by truth, because every subject in that system has decided to accept deception over truth. Thus, in the famous story of "The Emperor's New Clothes," all of the citizens feel more comfortable accepting the lie that the emperor is dressed than acknowledging the truth that he is naked. Due to this general acceptance of cultural lies, one cannot simply undermine prejudices by pointing to their false grounds, because the prejudiced subject can easily respond by stating: "I know that I am a racist and that racism is wrong. But, still racial stereotypes are the way that we structure our social reality." In other terms, the postmodern subject accepts the fictional nature of all ideological constructions and thus refuses to give up prejudices just because they are based on fictions.

In order to fight against the forces of racism, sexism, and homophobia, we need to take into account on a national and social level the repressed desires and fears that support our own society. In *Writing Prejudices*, I will provide a pedagogical method for undermining naturalized racist metaphors and exposing the perverse eroticization of power relations. This mode of teaching is predicated on a form of psychoanalytic criticism that is not content

with just interpreting texts but that seeks to motivate real social change. One of the ways that this form of change can occur is through the recognition of social and psychological patterns of subjection. By examining the masochistic aspects of internalized prejudices, we can help to undermine the power of diverse forms of oppression. This work entails the development of a communal form of psychoanalysis that explores the dialectic between the national unconscious and diverse forms of subjectivity.

Throughout *Writing Prejudices*, I will outline a series of pedagogical interventions that can help teachers and students to go beyond the simple detection of prejudices. This process includes:

1. Helping students to acknowledge and express their own repressed desires, fears, and anxieties;
2. Connecting the cultural to the personal by constantly linking literary texts to current social contexts;
3. Discussing alternative modes of identity and identification that do not require the debasement of a devalORIZED Other;
4. Exploring the defenses and resistances that prevent the detection of the underlying psychological roots of prejudice;
5. Connecting the formation of prejudices to economic and political forces;
6. Exploring the social construction of homophobia and the way that it produces other modes of prejudice;
7. Educating in a way that allows students and teachers to express their own divided subjectivities;
8. Insisting that students and teachers formulate possible solutions to social problems.

Many of these suggestions involve making the educational process more personal and relevant for our current students. For some critics and scholars, these strategies may seem like a naive attempt to do away with historical differences. However, I would like to affirm that history only becomes important if it is related to the present and the future. Like art for art's sake, history for history's sake only serves to reinforce the destructive cycle of prejudice that still functions today.