**UNPACKING IDEOLOGY – an example of what you need to do**

The difficulty of an historical text based reading is that the text is accepted as it is written. In a contemporary reading it is possible to harass a text and expose the inconsistencies, gaps and silences the text attempts to conceal.

One way of harassing or deconstructing a text is to analyse the binary oppositions within a text. There are simple binaries such as “good” and “evil” that contribute to an invited reading as used by structuralist theorists or binary oppositions that create hierarchies and can be used to isolate privileged ideologies within the text. I have compiled a list of binary oppositions that appear within the text and allow one to question the dominant ideologies underpinning the text.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Privileged | Marginalised |
| Beauty | unattractiveness |
| Marriage  Physical adeptness | Solitude  To be unfit |
| Sweetness of voice | Shrillness of cackle |
| Freedom | Isolation |
| Little to eat | Plenty to waste |

These binaries privilege a specific way of life and physical characteristics that are intended to be more desirable than the other half of the binary.

As an individual having experienced the intellectual freedom of the 20th and 21st century, my own ideologies do not match those embedded within the text. I therefore applied a contemporary text-centred approach and a world-context centred approach which problematises a historical text-centred approach. As New Critics considered a text “a self contained alternative to the ‘real’ world” (Wimmsat and Beardsley) a world context centred approach considers a text to be a reflection of the ideologies and discourses of the social situation it was created in.

A world context centred reading has historically asks the question “who’s interests are being served?”. In the case of “Rapunzel”, the reader can look towards the privileged and marginalised binaries to determine who the ideologies privileged benefit. As I have mentioned the strong patriarchal implications of the text are reflected in the binary oppositions.

To unpack the text’s ideology , questions must be asked of the text so as to decipher who is being privileged within the text.

I asked the following questions of Rapunzel;  
  
Who is active?

The prince  
Rapunzels’ father  
The witch  
  
Who is capable of direct speech?  
The witch

The prince

The father

The mother is only capable of conveying her desire through speech however represents no complex thought.

Who is mobile or active?

The witch

The father

The prince

Who is static?

The mother

Rapunzel

Which characters are weak?

Rapunzel  
the mother

Which women are happy?  
The ones who are part of a “couple”   
Rapunzel and her mother

From these questions the privileged sex within the text is clearly represented. It can be seen that men are to be the active party at all times and women need do nothing for themselves. Women are seen to be weak and house bound, requiring men to fulfil their desires for them. Thus I have unpacked the patriarchal ideology of the text.

Taking these interpretations into account I have deduced that “Rapunzel” portrays men as active and women as passive. The ideology I have exposed also creates an impression that any women achieving the independence and capability of or exceeding that of a male must be evil and unnatural.

Thus feminist reading practices, such as analysing binary oppositions, must been used in order to deconstruct the text. Feminist theory explores the untruths of gender based stereotypes. Moon defines gender stereotypes as the cultural assumptions used to define men from women that have nothing to do with biology. As this text is rampant with gender based inequality, I have chosen to use feminist theory to oppose this ideology. Moon summarises feminist critics’ arguments into three levels: the production level, the structural and linguistic level and the level of culturally accepted reading practises. I have focused on criticism of the linguistic level to construct my reading.

The linguistic and structural level examined by feminists is that of structure within the text itself as subtle privileging occurs each time a man and a woman are placed together in the text. Whenever this occurs, the man’s title or name will be placed before that of the woman making them appear the more important of the pair. I.e. *there once lived a MAN and WOMAN, children that she had borne a BOY and a GIRL*. Within the story the male is also privileged by being active in pursuing conversation, no female aside from the witch initiates conversation i.e. *HE asked HER to take him for her husband, the man was uneasy and asked “what is the matter dear wife?”.* David Birch claims that “*language is one of the main means of oppression*” this implies that by different constructions of language it is easy to marginalise a woman and naturalise the marginalisation with language choice and word placement.

Similarly at a linguistic level, males within the tale are always referred to by their position i.e. *The kings’ son*. However when males are referring to women, in particular, the prince referring to Rapunzel; the women are described or likened to valuable possessions i.e. (describing Rapunzel) *hair that shone like gold*, (the kings’ son referring to Rapunzel’s hair) *since that is the ladder I shall climb it and seek my fortune*. This also applies to Propps’ morphology when he suggests that when a protagonist achieves his goal he is rewarded with marriage or material wealth. Similarly, when we apply structuralist criticism as denoted by Moon; we examine the functions of characters within a text and apply them to the tale. Consequently we discover the roles played out by characters and how through use of language the female has been reduced to and Object.   
In the tale of Rapunzel, the prince has the function of the hero and the object is Rapunzel