**English Extension Assignment 2 (VHA10, 2014)**

*Marxist Complex Transformation*

**Complex Transformation** \_\_\_

A Debt of Gratitude

To Dr. Liza and Dr. Ratcliff,

I stand in eternal gratitude to you both. Before, I was living in eternal darkness, yet you showed me the light. When my wife Sandra looks at me, I can look back. Now, I can watch my baby girl grow; she truly is beautiful… and without your operation I would never have known.

Your work has changed my life. I know that I shall be in your office next Tuesday but I simply could not wait to show my appreciation. To me, you ophthalmologists are heroes.

Thank you for the gift of sight,

William Prince.

**Defence** \_\_\_

***Caveat Lector***

*Let the reader beware…*

*The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains”* [Marx; 1848]

Marxian philosophies are concerned with resisting the capitalist hegemony in order *“to bring about a classless society”* [Barry; 1995, p 156]. While both Karl Marx and Frederich Engels failed to offer a comprehensive literary theory, Marxist literary criticism has been established through the appropriation of their theories regarding *“class relations and struggle, commodification and alienation”* [Haslett; 2000, p 9].

*“The Little Glass Slipper,”* commonly known as *“Cinderella,”* naturalizes the oppression of the proletariat. Adapted by Frenchman Charles Perrault in 1697, the story focuses upon a young woman’s marriage to a prince, an event which allows her to escape the mistreatment she endures from her step-mother and step-sisters. The dominant ideology expressed in the fairy-taleis that wealth bestows authority and euphoria and therefore should be aspired to. The Deconstructionist approach of analysing binary oppositions reveals disparity between the privileged wealthy and the marginalized poor: Cinderella, who initially embodies the exploited poor, sleeps *“in a sorry garret, on a wretched straw bed”* and is employed *“in the meanest work of the house”* by her wealthy step-mother. In this world, wealth is synonymous with power. Similarly, Cinderella’s euphoria attending the ball - only permitted due to her acquired, affluent clothes - transmits the belief that wealth is a necessity for enjoyment. Finally, the closure, typical of the fairy-tale genre, suggests that as Cinderella now possesses wealth - having married a prince - her life is complete. For Cinderella, wealth is the desire and the destination.

However, Terry Eagleton contends that *“no work … can be extended to new groups of people without being changed”* [Eagleton; 1996, p 11]. When reading from a Marxist perspective, an oppositional reading is produced which emphasizes the injustices the proletariat suffers. Concealed beneath the façade of aspiring for wealth and love are ideologies which *“coerce the reader into accepting”* [Johnson, 2001] that the working class is justly submissive to the bourgeoisie: exploitation of the poor by the upper-class is blatant but largely unquestioned as, supposedly, affluence grants them the authority to subordinate the lower classes.

Orthodox Marxists advocate *reflectionism,* a term which posits that *“literature is nothing but ideology in a certain artistic form”* [Eagleton; 1976, p 17]. Texts are seen as deliberate constructs determined by the economic base, specifically, the class which produced them. For Marxists, *“the author becomes an anonymous class-representative who programmatically rehearses the ideas of his or her own class”* [Haslett; 2000, p 7]. Regardless of the author’s motivations, *“The Little Glass Slipper”* alienates the proletariats and thus endorses the social structure which favours the wealthy.

Karl Marx’s term *‘alienation’* refers to the distortion of social relations through the *‘fetishism of commodities’*: The creation of a commodity *“objectifies [the proletariat’s] individuality”* [Marx, 1844] and therefore allows *“enjoyment […] of being conscious of having satisfied a human need”* [Marx, 1844]. Marx thus finds criticism in wage labour for, *“presupposing private property, [… the proletariat] works in order to live”* [Marx, 1844]. As the capitalist owns the labour process, the product is the property of the capitalist and alien to the worker. The lizards and rat - transformed into footmen and a coachman - typify the commodified proletariat. Their efforts in fabricating Cinderella’s wealthy image are reduced to *‘conspicuous consumption’*, the acquisition of items solely for their extrinsic value. Cinderella flaunts her possession of *“her coachman […] rat, her footmen lizards”* to establish her stature. Therefore, in their servitude, the footmen and coachman suffer dehumanization as the embodiment of wealth. This prerogative is further encouraged by the marginalization the footmen and coachman endure. As Eagleton cites, *“a work is tied to ideology not so much by what it says as by what it does not say”* [Eagleton; 1976, p 34]. During their transformation, the lizards and rat offer no vocalisation, embracing their reification as accessories to Cinderella. At the ball, no reference is made to the footmen or coachman for, their purpose fulfilled, the plot discards them entirely. Consequently, the text affirms the unjust prioritization of wealth above poverty. To ensure the continuation of this unjust structure, the text also instigates a *‘false consciousness’* in the proletariats.

Derived from Marxist analysis of social class, *‘false consciousness’,* first coined by Marx’s contemporary Fredrich Engels, describes *“the misconception of dominant social relations in the [oppressed class]”* [Engels, 1893]. Engels claims that ideology mystifies the subordination of the proletariat through suppression of bourgeoisie absolutism. Content with this false reality, the proletariat continues to labour despite *“the real motives impelling him remain[ing] unknown to him”* [Engels, 1893]. The prince’s ball exemplified suppressive ideologies which attempt to indoctrinate the reader: Only *“persons of fashion”* attend as the footmen and coachman, not possessing wealth, believe such an event to be irrelevant to ones of their lowly status. Corrupt bourgeoisie ideology has naturalized the financially-exclusive nature of the ball through false consciousness in the proletariat, again privileging the upper-class. However, this perspective relies upon an apprehension of ideology as a definite diversion from reality.

Louis Althusser, a modern Marxist critic, offers an understanding of ideology problematic to the historical belief in *‘false consciousness.’* Where false consciousness is a *“false understanding of the way the world functions”* [Althusser, 1970], Althusser contends that *“ideology represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”* [Althusser, 1970], that ideological conventions are misconceptions of already false reality as opposed to merely reflections of that same reality. According to Althusser, *“ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects”* [Althusser, 1970], whereas false consciousness merely defines the individual. At the instant of transformation, the footmen and coachman establish their subservience to Cinderella and *“skipped up immediately behind the coach […] and clung as close behind each other as if they had done nothing else their whole lives.”* Despite never having encountered social conventions, the footmen are conscious of their supposed inferiority to Cinderella and accept their interpellation. Their actions constitute a misrepresentation of society which prioritizes the wealthy. The reader is therefore *‘hailed’* into conceiving this subordination as natural. However, Althusser’s interpellation theory claims that *“individuals are always-already subjects”* [Althusser, 1970] whereas the lizards’ and rats’ dramatic change in behaviour suggests they acted beyond the dominant ideologies in their primal state. This solidifies the pervasiveness of the *‘ideological state apparatuses,’* the hegemonic institutions unified in subscription to bourgeoisie ideology. Through becoming human, these ignorant creatures are conditioned to value themselves as lesser beings in comparison to Cinderella and her *“cloth of gold and silver, all beset with jewels.”* The text thus associates intelligent existence with the dominant ideologies the bourgeoisie employs to maintain power.

Marxist criticism *“calls on the writer to commit his art to the cause of the proletariat”* [Eagleton; 1976, p 37]. To become socially just, the naturalized subordinationof the labourers in *“The Little Glass Slipper”* required rectification. By transitioning from a socioeconomic to a medical discourse, employing a *“recast[…] of genre, time, place, participants and medium”* [Pope; 1995, p 2], my transformed text “*A Debt of Gratitude”* critiques the base text’s concept of wealth. Instead of presenting the asymmetrical relationship between the proletariats and bourgeoisie as a natural state, I established equilibrium for the characters by elevating the proletariats to a position of respect as ophthalmologists. Granting identities to *“Dr. Liza and Dr. Ratcliff”* obstruct the commodification present in the base text by imparting a humane characteristic – a name - as does their benevolent occupation. Therefore, the proletariat’s dehumanization as the embodiment of wealth, a product to be owned, is removed and the bourgeoisie’s conspicuous consumption is dismantled. Similarly, altering the genre from a fairy-tale to a letter of appreciation counters the alienation experienced by the proletariats in the base text. Constructing the character of William Prince in *“eternal gratitude”* to the ophthalmologists allowed the proletariats the enjoyment of satisfying a human need they are denied in *“The Little Glass Slipper”.* The letter also implies that the ophthalmologists’ labour was an act of humanitarianism motivated by Dr. Liza and Dr. Ratcliff’s volition as opposed to the result of their interpellation or false consciousness.

Having taken a Marxist perspective, it became apparent that *“The Little Glass Slipper”,* while superficially concerned with aspirations of wealth, seeks to indoctrinate the reader into believing that the bourgeoisie are justly dominant in society. Injustice is evident in the alienation, false consciousness and interpellation experienced by the lizards and rat which feature in the fairy-tale. As I desired to rectify these inequalities, I produced a text which shifted the economical discourse to a medical discourse. In this transformed text, the lizards and rat were granted status and *libertas* through their identity, occupation and the gratitude expressed by the transformed prince. This elevation, while not the revolt Marx predicted would occur when the proletariat rebelled, remedies the unjust exploitation present in *“The Little Glass Slipper”. (1829 words)*

Bibliography \_\_\_

Louis Althusser, 1970, “*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”,* La Pensѐe, Marxism Today

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~carlos/607/readings/althusser.pdf>

Louis Althusser, 1964, “*Marxism and Humanism”,* Cahiers de l’, I.S.E.A <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1964/marxism-humanism.htm>

Peter Barry, PB, 1995, “*Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*”, Manchester University Press, Oxford Road, Manchester

Jacques Derrida, 1967, “*Writing and Difference*”, (translated by Alan Bass), Routledge Classics, 11 New Fetter Lane, London

Terry Eagleton, 1976, “*Marxism and Literary Criticism*”, Methuen and Co. Ltd, 11 New Fetter Lane, London

Terry Eagleton, 1991, “*Ideology: An Introduction”,* London: Verso

Terry Eagleton, 1996, *“Literary Theory: An Introduction”,* Blackwell Publishers, Great Britain

Fredrich Engels, 1893, *“Engels to Franz Mehring; Marx-Engels Correspondence”,* Gestamtausgabe,

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm>

Moyra Haslett, 2000, “*Marxist* *Literary and Cultural Theories”*, St. Martin’s Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York

Greer Johnson, 2001, “*Understanding Textual Intervention: From Reading to Writing Practice”*, Australian Association for the Teaching of English, Griffith Institute

Karl Marx, KM, 1844, “*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts”,* S.U Press

Karl Marx, KM, 1848, *“Das Kommunistische Manifest”,* Deursche Londoner Zeitung

Rob Pope, RP, 1995, “*Textual Intervention: Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies”,* Psychology Press, London

**Points to Note**

* Complex transformation can be brief yet effective.
* Transform short texts with readily identifiable instances of class, race or gender bias.
* Pay close attention to paragraph structure, especially topic and linking sentences.
* Note and emulate the concision evident here.
* Use fewer theoretical texts well; Pope and Johnson insights vip as very little is written about complex transformations elsewhere.
* Assist students to deconstruct this model response by using a gradual release of responsibility strategy together with a three column analysis or colour code for text structure and language features.

Student subsequently awarded VHA10.