LECTURE NOTES:
Fish & Deconstruction
Summary, Explanation & Practical Applications

- Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*"
  - 3 essays:
    - reader-response readings (2074, 2076)
    - why reader-response doesn't work
      - assumption of meaning in text (2079A) – no
      - reader's activities = meaning (2079B) & (2083A)
      - questions identity of reader (2079C)
      - structure of reader's experience = reader's efforts at understanding (2081A)
        - * = reader's realization of an author's intention
        - * but no one authorial intention b/c interpreted differently by every person
      - informed reader = reader's interpretation depends upon community (2081B)
      - what being interpreted is constituted by the interpretive act (not exist prior) (2083B)
    - **interpretive communities** = provide foundation for interpretation
      - membership = fellowship (no other proof) (2089A)
      - forms not first, but constituted by interpretative acts (2085A)
      - no one process for individual reader or differing readers (2085 & 2086A))
      - reading acts give text shape rather than rising from them (2085B)
      - readers who interpret w/same strategies both part of same interpretive community (2087)
        - * temporarily agree on way to write (not way to read)
        - * not agree on stability of text
        - * readers part of multiple interpretive communities
        - * IC not stable & not completely agree – because = learned
          - + texts not read differently
          - + written differently (2088A)
  - **texts = empty** (differs from Iser)
    - **made only by act of reading (but not individual reading response)**
      - "difficulty we experience in the act of reading = what the lines mean" (2068)
      - meaning as process (not formal product)
    - no author or authorial intentions
    - meaning through interpretive communities (protocols of communities)
  - interpretive communities
    - membership in communities generates interpretation
    - precursor to Marxist criticism
    - moves away from individual & reader
    - community made up of those sharing interpretive strategies for writing (not reading)

- **Deconstruction**
  - **See TC front cover**
  - looking for unities (New Critics) to take apart
  - assumption: language makes meaning with binary oppositions
    - words make sense because of relationship to other words: good vs. bad

- meaning = relative & relational
- language = arbitrary & unstable
○ b/c of lang, text contradicts itself & contains tracers of its opposite
    - turns text against itself
    - can't be mutually exclusive b/c one contaminates other
○ always gap/space in the text that the reader can't ultimately fill in (TC 103A)
    - disavows Iser's reader-response theory
○ <u>Definition</u>
    - "theory of reading which aims to undermine the logic of opposition within texts" (Payne 136)
    - "questions assumptions & limitations of textual meaning by revealing how the polarities & certainties a text has proposed have actually been constructed through a series of preferences & repressions which have privileged certain ideas, values & arguments above others" (Payne 136)
        ■ man vs. woman = binary opposition
            * constructed meaning for each & in their opposition
            * really = just difference (not hierarchy)
        ■ possibility & impossibility of pinning down coherent, unproblematic meaning of a text (136)
    - "reflects on readings and interpretations which have produced the status of dominant works" – DISCOURSE (Payne 136)
    - "reflection on the act of reading, examining how interpretations have been produced, and what these interpretations have marginalized, presupposed or ignored" (Ibid)
    - Subtext:
        ■ All parts of text are included in its interpretation = footnotes, marginalia, elisions, metaphors

○ <u>Limitations</u>:
    - deconstructive theory deconstructs itself
    - ignores political commitment
    - neglects social & economic reference

○ **Practical Application**
    - look for oppositions, reversal & ambiguities
        ■ in ending
        ■ in small elements of text
        ■ in literary structure
    - reinterprets meaning of text
        ■ text reveals what is being excluded or suppressed

    - Strategy (TC 112):
        ■ identify oppositions in text
        ■ determine which member appears to be favored
        ■ look for evidence that contradicts that favoring
        ■ expose the texts indeterminacy