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
  ○ **Definition**
    - “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
  ○ **Limitations:**
    - 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