

Literature in the Age of Deconstruction

Literary deconstruction is a method whereby critics assume all meanings in a work are unstable and arbitrary and that a reader may generate meanings different from or beyond those intended by its author.

Deconstruction implies that meaning is not ultimately created by an author but by the interaction between an author's words and a reader's interpretive imagination. Reader-generated meaning is primary. Any given text takes on a life of its own, independent of context or the purpose its author may have had in creating it.

In theory then, any random collection of words or symbols can become meaningful, even if created by mindless chimpanzees using a typewriter. In his famous book *Of Grammatology* (1957), philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) expresses his belief that "there is nothing outside the text," not even its author.

Some Questions about Literary Deconstruction:

- How important is literary craftsmanship in the composition of a story, a poem, a novel, or any other genre?
- What are important implications for education and literacy?
- Are postmodern philosophers actually intellectual charlatans? If so, what about professors and teachers who approvingly teach their texts?
- Ironically, can freedom to interpret, unfettered by an author's intent, make it possible for the ambitious to promote plausible interpretations of culturally and historically important texts friendly to their desire for gaining and keeping political power?
- Can the interpretive freedom of many lead to tyranny by the few?