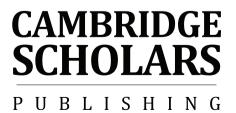# A Theory of Literary Explication

A Theory of Literary Explication:
Specifying a Relativistic Foundation in Epistemic Probability, Cognitive Science, and Second-Order Logic

by

Kenneth B. Newell

"There is no Archimedean point of absolute certainty left to which to attach our knowledge of the world; all we have is an elastic net of probability connections floating in open space."
—Hans Reichenbach

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A Note on Documentation

As is common in scholarly works, this book contains many notes and some lengthy notes—both source citations and substantive (or discursive) notes—and so a documentation style has been chosen to allow the reader easily to decide the extent to which she wishes her reading of notes to interrupt her reading of the main text: interruption by only one kind of note or the other or neither or both kinds. Consequently, all notes will be endnotes, those that are only source citations will be designated by the traditional superscript arabic numerals, but those that are either substantive notes or source citations accompanied by substantive notes will be designated by nontraditional superscript italicized capital letters of the alphabet. By this means, when the reader comes upon either superscript symbol while reading the main text, she will know without interrupting her reading which kind of endnote awaits her attention and will be able to choose whether or not she wants to attend to it at that point.

PREFACE

A reader of literature is really a reader-explicator since, to try to understand what she is reading, she must explicate it, and, to do that, she must often choose between different possible explications of the literary work. In this book I use current multidisciplinary research and theory to show that choosing between explications (as distinguished from interpretations) can be based on a special kind of probability—on what I will describe below as "second-order relative objective epistemic probability" (hereafter abbreviated as the acronym "SOROEP"). This probability, in turn, rests not only on two of the currently disparaged but major traditional philosophical foundations (rationalism and empiricism) but also on two *non*traditional foundations—a cognitive rather than a philosophical one (implicit or tacit procedural knowledge, which is based in the adaptive unconscious) and a relativistic rather than an absolute one (second-order logic, which is a relativistic logic). (A relativistic foundation, it should be noted, represents a middle way between the possibility of an absolute philosophical foundation and the impossibility of any kind of philosophical foundation.[A]) Consequently, there is more than justification for stating, in respect to a literary work, either that explication *X* is more probable than explication *Y* or that *X* is more-or-less as probable as *Y*. Either statement is a statement of SOROEP.

But, before describing in Chapter 4 the concept of SOROEP and my claim that it supports the practice of explication (though not necessarily interpretation), it is necessary to establish in the first three chapters that explication can be distinguished from interpretation (or other kinds of interpretation), that such explication is still needed in literary studies, and that reasoned argument, which supports explication and the use of SOROEP, is still a viable practice.

Admittedly, no explication of a literary work can be shown to be the "true," "correct," or "author's" reading[B] (if one exists). And no explication can be shown to be even a "probable" reading.[C] Nonetheless, the practice of explication is more than justified because of eight interrelated reasons in aggregate: (1) because reasoned argument based on evidence can produce a *relative*-probability judgment about a reading—a judgment that it is either more probable than an alternative reading or more-or-less as probable as an alternative one; (2) because that judgment, while allowing

the work an unlimited number of readings, provides a way to judge among them and thereby constitutes a middle-way compromise between the two current but widely unaccepted extreme views of interpretation—the view that the work has only an unlimited number of equally acceptable though different readings (i.e., the work has no *un*equally acceptable readings), which are all misreadings anyway, and the opposing view that it has only one acceptable reading, which can be discovered; (3) because that judgment is based on the above-mentioned four foundations—rationalism, empiricism, implicit (or tacit) procedural knowledge, and second-order logic; (4) because that judgment is similar to an estimation of the extent of difference between the mental images of two different external objects— an estimation that is an example of implicit (or tacit) knowledge; (5) because that judgment is also a relativistic example of "transcendental" principles first described by Kant; (6) because on that judgment there can be a consensus (which may range from majority agreement to unanimity) among those explicating the work in accordance with relative probability; (7) because this consensus may be due to an evolved, uniform, and probably innate[1] ability in the healthy, adult human brain to form relative-probability judgments and to form them in the practice of activities (like reading and explicating) that are not uniform and innate; and (8) because that consensus can occur even under (or despite) the assumed condition that both the amount of evidence pertinent to the work and the number of possible explications of the work are infinite.

It should be noted that, in the first reason, the main verb is not *produces* or *should produce* but *can produce* because the action designated by the predicate is neither merely descriptive of how readers use reasoned argument nor merely prescriptive (normative) of how they *should* use it. The action is partly both—another middle way, this time between the descriptive and the prescriptive (normative). To use philosopher Paul Thagard's term, the action is "biscriptive."[2] Reasoned argument based on evidence produces a relative-probability judgment about a reading only when the reader chooses to use such reasoned argument for that purpose. She is free to choose otherwise.

In the sixth and eighth reasons the main verb is also a *can* verb because the cognitive conditions (discussed in Part II) relevant to the production of relative-probability judgments do not guarantee consensus among the judgments. They only foster it.

The sixth and seventh reasons also present a middle way between extremes because those explicating a literary work in accordance with relative probability can achieve consensus rather than, on the one hand, complete disagreement with one another (which would support the

extreme view that the work has only a limitless number of equally acceptable though different readings) and, on the other hand, nothing less than complete agreement with one another (which would support the extreme view that the work has only one acceptable reading). Explicators of the work can *at least* achieve consensus perhaps because of the above-mentioned human brain's ability to form SOROEP judgments, but explicators can *at most* achieve consensus (rather than consistent unanimity) because that ability does not guarantee agreement but only fosters it.

There is one additional respect in which this book presents a middle way between extremes, but in this case there are *three* extreme views: that literary explication has an as-yet-undiscovered *absolute* foundation that justifies a reading of a work to be judged more acceptable than another; that literary explication has no such foundation and justification; and that, if literary explication has no such foundation and justification that traditionally it was supposed to have in rationalism and empiricism, then it *needs* no foundation or justification. The first extreme view is implicit in critical works with a modern approach, the second in works with a postmodern approach, and the third in works reacting against a postmodern approach. My middle-way view is that, when literary explication is based on SOROEP, it has a *relativistic* foundation and that this is enough of a foundation to more than justify some reading(s) of a literary work to be judged more acceptable than others.

In the course of justifying explication and specifically explication based on relative-probability judgments, I use material not only from critical theory and hermeneutics (as might he expected) but also from probability theory, philosophy of science, second-order logic, and four fields of cognitive science (linguistics, epistemology, neuropsychology, and artificial intelligence); moreover, I touch upon textual criticism, legal theory, measure theory, fuzzy logic, animal learning behavior, developmental psychology, evolutionary epistemology, and neurobiology. Here my purpose is to show from a wide range of disciplines (most of them never before applied to literary explication) how other researchers' theories and ideas are relevant to a justification of explication.

In this way I hope to show that explication based on SOROEP judgments is more than justified even in this postmodern era—an era in which the amount of literary interpretation has gradually but greatly declined and, where still practiced, is practiced for the sake of "Theory" and Cultural Studies and, like them, for the sake of politics. Against this postmodern tendency there were initially only occasional reactions in print from academics; but since the late '90s such reactions have appeared with

some regularity, and a middle-way viewpoint may be growing. It has come to be felt that one should attend "not only to the most fashionable intellectual ideas but also to competing traditions . . . that, precisely because they are less radical, ultimately may be more progressive."[3] There have been calls for a return to literature[4] as well as to literary criticism and interpretation.[D] The aesthetic in literature has re-appreciated in value,[E] and in the philosophy of aesthetics intentionalism has reappeared.[F] If it spreads, "the death of the author" may be succeeded by his resurrection as "the hypothetical author" or as the actual author whose intention is supported either by the text[5] or by its function as a work of art,[6] or as the actual author with whom, regardless of his intention, the reader is engaged by way of or through the mediation of the text.[7] In poetry New Formalism has appeared, and now a "new formalism" is appearing in critical theory.[8] However, a viable way to return to literary criticism is not to retreat to a restrictively formalist New Criticism but, taking advantage of the philosophical and cognitive justifications described herein, to practice explication based on SOROEP judgments. Such a practice is a way to respond to the current call in *PMLA* for ideas on the topic "Literary Criticism for the Twenty-First Century"—for ideas on how to "remobilize" the field. After the last few decades "we may have entered a moment of reconstruction or regeneration in which we seek other forms of literary-theoretical knowledge. . . . Are there current approaches that have not yet been fully developed, that would richly repay attention?"[9]

To practice explication based on SOROEP judgments (it should be noted) does not require a revolutionary or even an original kind of explicatory practice. Ever since some readings of a literary work were first preferred to other readings, some readers have consciously or unconsciously preferred the "more probable" ones.[G] And some readers who have preferred the readings that they felt were "more inclusive" or "more coherent" or both have, in many cases, unknowingly approximated preferring the "more probable" ones, since "more inclusive" or "more coherent" or their combination can, in many cases, approximate "more probable" even though not being equivalent to it. (Only when readers prefer the readings they feel to be, for example, "richer" or more "interesting," "topical," or "relevant" are these readings less likely to be the "more probable" ones.) Therefore, the purpose of this book is not to show how to make a more probable reading of a literary work or even how to judge which are the more probable readings—for, if indeed readers do choose the SOROEP criterion, they already know instinctively how to use it in judging between readings since that knowledge is part of the implicit (or tacit) procedural knowledge based in their adaptive unconscious.

Instead, the purpose of this book is to show merely but crucially that using the SOROEP criterion in judging between readings has more than a philosophical and cognitive justification—it has a relativistic foundation.

[T]he only thing that is really desirable without a reason for being so, is to render ideas and things reasonable. One cannot well demand a reason for reasonableness itself.
—Charles Sanders Peirce, 1900

The term *reason* has almost always been used to cover an area far larger than is covered by logic. Plato and Aristotle used *reason*— both *logos* and *nous*, I'm told—to refer to the capacity to discover sound first principles, to make assumptions, or to formulate alternative hypotheses, as well as to the capacity to test those principles or hypotheses dialectically and to construct chains of argument from them logically.
—Wayne C. Booth, 1970

. . . Leibniz . . . conceived of Probability as a branch of Logic . . . [and so introduced the] enquiries of the philosopher into those processes of human faculty which, by determining reasonable preference, guide our choice. . . .
—John Maynard Keynes, 1921

[On] the question . . . what to do about the "bottomless pit" phenomenon . . . , with our concern about the lack of a Foundation . . . "acting on the probabilities" is the only rational thing to do, and . . . one ought to do the rational thing even in unrepeatable situations.
—Hilary Putnam, 1987

It cannot be denied that a probable interpretation can be made where a certain one is not possible, but this would be too difficult to put into rules since a rational theory of probability has not yet been sufficiently developed. . . . It is no wonder then that the theory of interpretation has been attacked in its most difficult chapter and that it has not been easy to come away from this.
—Johann Martin Chladenius, 1742, translated from the German

An interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another. There are criteria of relative superiority which may easily be derived from the logic of subjective probability.
—Paul Ricoeur, 1971, translated from the French[10]

PART I:

A DEFENSE OF EXPLICATION

CHAPTER ONE

EXPLICATION AND INTERPRETATION

The term *explication* is used loosely here, but it is used intentionally rather than *interpretation*. Although any difference between the terms can reduce to a difference in degree rather than kind, the distinction between them or between the degrees of criticism they represent is nonetheless used and may not be expendable.[A] Even a leading deconstructionist, who espouses the Nietzschian idea that "reading is . . . the importation of meaning into a text which has no meaning 'in itself,'" uses a traditional etymological distinction between *explicate* and *interpret—* the one "in the sense of unfold, unravel, or unweave," the other "in the sense of . . . tease . . . for multiple meanings or implications."[B] There are also other distinctions. If a work contains any "crux"—i.e., not just an unsolved problem or baffling passage but one "upon which interpretation of the rest of the work depends"[1]—an attempt to solve it is an explication rather than an interpretation.

Explication may also be distinguished from *two* other kinds of interpretation even while being situated between them—between establishment of an "authoritative" text involving textual or bibliographical "interpretation"[2] and critical interpretation of the then established text. Here, explication is capable of mediating between the two and, since different from both in degree rather than in kind, forms a continuum between them. Similar to such mediation, explication has also been considered a "negotiation" between the first two of the three objectives of interpretation: "(1) the author's intention—what someone meant by writing the text to be interpreted, (2) the literal meaning—what the text says given the individual meanings of words and the composed meaning of sentences, and (3) the representative content—what the text as a whole means—in the sense of what it represents."[3]

Minus a mediating/negotiating function, explication has been distinguished from another two kinds of interpretation: explanation and exploration. In *explication* the reader reconstructs "authorial meaning" through "objective interpretation" of "communicative . . . authorial signals"; in *explanation* the reader deconstructively explains "informative

. . . textual symptoms" of what the text conceals, and in *exploration* the reader participatorily experiences "disclosures" that "fuse" her cultural context with the author's.[4]   Alternatively, another two kinds of interpretation from which explication has been distinguished are translation-into-a-theoretical-language and intervention. In *explication* the reader glosses the words and the cultural context of the text and then initially guesses but eventually solves the "enigma" of the text by "drawing inferences from hints" therein about the author's "constructed intention"; in *translation-into-a-theoretical-language* the reader emphasizes language and the text rather than the "intention of meaning as source of the text"; and in *intervention* the reader intervenes by "construct[ing]" meaning to promote "affect."[5]

Explication has been considered an interpretive activity like "construing the import of a remark in dialogue and explaining a datum in science." Unlike a merely "decoding" activity (such as understanding the syntax of the simplest sentence or reading a thermometer), which is an "invariant or rule-governed translation" of a datum, an activity like explication is a "process of inference to the best explanation of the type familiar from the philosophy of science"[C] and important in the philosophy of realism.[6] Explication has also been considered a prose paraphrase (especially in France[D]) or a prose translation or "an equivalent . . . only of the *conceptual* portion" of the "total meaning," which is "a synthesis of conceptual and attitudinal meanings,"[7] or a statement having the same reference though not the same meaning as a text in the sense that Sir Walter Scott and the author of *Waverley* have the same reference though not the same meaning,[E] or a reading of a text "for a knowledge of each part and for the relation of these parts to the whole."[F]

Any of the above definitions will serve for the purpose of the present work even though none of them are wholly satisfactory because of possible implications. For instance, the last definition may imply a reading confined within the limits of the text by New Critical insistence on the self-sufficiency of the text. But, if extratextual material (whether published or unpublished, public or private) such as an earlier draft, comparable text, authorial statement of intention, or historical or biographical information seemed relevant to understanding a text, explication as it is used here would take that material into consideration as evidence for a particular explication. Especially in France, explication preceded the New Criticism, had and still has a validity independent of it, and so need not be considered as having perished with the latter's demise. Just as that more generalized activity known as "close reading" is still viable,[8] so is explication.

The term *construe* is often used as a synonym for *explicate*, and, if its use as a noun were not so awkward from unfamiliarity, the term would be

as suitable in the present work as *explication*. After all, the range of its definitions allows it to be, like explication, a kind of interpretation yet distinguished from interpretation and, because of its association with syntax and grammar, at a more basic level than interpretation (or, if you prefer, at the most basic level of interpretation):

> *construe* . . . To apply the rules of syntax to (a sentence or clause) so as to exhibit the structure, arrangement, or connection of, or to discover the sense; to explain the construction of; to interpret; also, to translate, esp. orally. Also, *Gram.*, now less commonly, to construct. . . . To put a construction upon; to explain the sense or intention of; spec., as disting. from interpret; to discover and apply the meaning and intention of with reference to a particular state of affairs; to interpret; understand; also, to deduce or infer by construction.[G]

Like explication, construe examines the relation of parts to the whole by examining "structure, arrangement, or connection"; construe too can be considered translation; and, like explication as distinguished above from explanation and exploration, it is differentiated from deconstruction by being associated not only with "construction" but also with authorial meaning ("sense or intention").

Most of these terms and distinctions are used, for example, by I.A. Richards to describe the difficulty of readers in

> *making out the plain sense* of poetry. . . . [They] *fail to understand it*, . . . to make out its prose sense, its plain overt meaning as a set of ordinary, intelligible, English sentences, taken quite apart from any further poetic significance. And equally, they misapprehend its feeling, its tone, and its intention. They would travesty it in a paraphrase. They fail to construe it just as a schoolboy fails to construe a piece of Caesar.[9]

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY AND PRACTICE

At first glance the above material may seem more suitable to a work of the '40s or '50s. And indeed, the present work does owe much to the doctrines of those decades. Nevertheless, it was written in and after the '90s under a familiarity with contemporary hermeneutics. Admittedly, hermeneutics must remain of paramount interest to the close reader of literature, if only because all critical practice illustrates theory whether or not the practitioner names the theory or even admits that one is operative. However, theory without practice is equally bad. Though practice without theory is blind, theory without practice is empty.[1] As philosopher Richard Rorty succinctly put it, "[d]isengagement from practice produces theoretical hallucinations";[2] and so, much theory "seems arid and unreal, out of phase with concrete issues in critical practice and pedagogy, and out of touch with human needs and interests."[3] Even worse, theory can be misused "to stand outside practice in order to govern practice from without."[4] Therefore, a practice is still necessary in which it and theory mutually guide each other: "[J]ust as theory can clarify and reform interpretive practice, it itself can be enlightened and reshaped by that practice."[5] Theory can guide practice by being used to "regulate the kinds of evidence that literary scholarship provides"—i.e., "not to replace or dismantle historical evidence but to guide our use of it to help us sort out issues of relevance, priority, and persuasiveness" and so promote "problem-solving rather than field-defining."[6] And practice can guide theory because it "enables a certain testing of theoretical positions in the detailed terms of practical criticism" and, conversely, "encourages bringing into theoretical reflection the assumptions that often lie unexamined in traditional forms of practical criticism."[7] Besides, to "a high degree the form of . . . theory *is* practice. However esoteric, most theorists begin with a text, and they arrive at their generalizations not through direct statement but through teasing them out of that text."[8] By this procedure a theory "grows fortuitously out of encountering the peculiar contingencies of peculiar texts," "allows itself to be modified by new bombardments of the same," and thereby avoids being "embraced

from the start as a highly systematized fait accompli to which the perceived actualities of literary experience must bend."[9]   And while theory "always depends on a background of entrenched interpretive practices that initially get it going and continue to orient it," it is, in turn, "judged pragmatically by its fruits in the practice that it can help reshape and sustain."[10]   But even where practice is considered only a means to an end that is theory,

> no one . . .—not Derrida or Foucault or Greenblatt or whoever—can do any work with literature at all without first performing acts of interpretation (something must be understood as something before it can be talked *about*).   Interpretation, however unimportant ultimately to the critic, is the necessary basis of larger speculation, to the extent that that speculation is concerned at all with *literature* and what it reveals about, say, history, mind, language, politics, or culture.[11]

Indeed, through ever larger speculation, interpretive literary theory has become interfused with all those other branches of study, making its concepts "oceanic" and therefore almost unmanageable.   However, they can still "become limited and manageable in interpretive practice."[12]

The necessity of practice is also part of the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer.   Although, in his philosophy, every interpretation is "prejudiced," it is not false per se: it is only "mediated by the prejudices of its time," is an effect of history, and "betrays the marks of its birth."   But the "true" prejudice can be discriminated from the false only through practice.   "The true prejudice is the one borne out by interpretation itself. What distinguishes the true from the false interpretation is not a principle but a process, for to historical beings truth is disclosed in the historical process of interpreting."[13]

Explicating traditional texts anew is also necessary for their own sake and not just to test or "tease out" theory, make its concepts manageable, or ascertain "true" interpretive "prejudice."   In opposition to this view, contemporary theorists have from time to time and for different reasons called for a moratorium on new readings,[A] and the best of those reasons may seem to be that, after a theory is teased out of a text, the theory spawns countless similar readings of countless other texts:

> Ever since the New Critical discovery that almost any work of literature could be read as a complex of paradoxes and ironies, critical "methodology," whatever other purposes it has served, has been an instrument for generating new "readings"—and thus new publications. The recent discovery that every text can be reinterpreted as a commentary on its own textual problematics or as a self-consuming artifact ensures that the production of new readings will not cease even though explication of many authors and works seems to have reached the point of saturation.[14]

But usually that point is not reached, for one has only "to immerse oneself in historical materials . . . to discover how little, on a given issue, has been settled once and for all."[15] There is always a need for a more clarifying reading regardless of the theory behind it and of the number of other readings available. According to Timothy Peltason,

> Although many current theorists complain that we are flooded by explications and that criticism must find itself a new job, I do not find in the course of my own reading and teaching any overabundance of helpful guides to the poems and novels that I am puzzled by. . . . In my own study . . . , it is the companionship and guidance of such readings that I have most often missed.[16]

* * * * * *

Of course, *any* interpretation theory or practice may seem irrelevant to more recently favored theories—to the New Historicism, for example, which may be favored precisely because "theoretical reflection has not been able to devise clear, indisputable procedures for producing correct interpretations. This problem, it is thought, can be bypassed, if not resolved, by turning to history."[17] However, instead of bypassing the problem, the New Historicism merely translates it into other terms—interprets historical context which interprets literature. The New Historicism is

> yet another fundamentally literary form of enquiry in which the verbal icon of the new critics is replaced with a cultural manifold to which the . . . exegetical skills of the literary critic are applied. . . . Greenblatt reads contexts as if they were metaphysical poems, and his method shares with New Criticism or deconstruction a hermeneutical license that has long been claimed by literary critics.[18]

In other words, "history does not tell us what the text is, because we decide what history is, and then put history into the text, rather than the other way around. . . . From this perspective, the new historicists' contextualization is just another form of interpretation."[19] The case is the same with Cultural Studies. If "the literary text emerges in a space and with an effectivity provided by the larger culture," it would seem that

> focusing on the larger culture is the way to focus on it. But . . . you cannot focus on the background array of social practices, on the "whole intertextual system of relations" within which everything is interdependent ("heteroglot") and nothing free-standing, without turning it into an object which is itself in need of the kind of explanation it supposedly provides.[20]

In other words, that background array of social practices becomes an object that must itself be interpreted.

> Interpretive practice is inevitable in another sense too. If we are teachers of literature, we teach future readers or interpreters or consumers, not, as most other disciplines do, future scientists or practitioners or producers. People—students and teachers—want to go on enjoying literature qua literature, no matter how problematic that *qua* is rendered by deconstruction, feminism, historicism, reader-response, or other theories. They have no answer to the point . . . that we have little need any more, as a scientific or intellectual profession, for repeated readings of classic texts. But such readings are what hermeneutics produces—and what it wants to produce.[21]

CHAPTER THREE

REASONED ARGUMENT

What also shows the legacy of the '40s and '50s in the present work is the principle that reasoned argument should support readings. Whenever this principle appeared sporadically in the '70s and '80s, it was seen as part of a "growing reactionary movement in the academy to recover the ideals of logic, reason, and determinate meaning and to repudiate the radicalism of the sixties and seventies."[1] Of course, such a reactionary movement never developed in theory and criticism. Besides, reasoned argument does not become discreditable because it can be used in an unpopular cause.[2]

Nor does it become discreditable because current theory views logic and reason as merely persuasion and rhetoric—for this view is contrary to views in cognitive linguistics, cognitive psychology, evolutionary epistemology, and neurobiology. There, conscious reason (including logic) is considered a product of biological evolution. By contrast, persuasion and rhetoric are later and cultural developments born of human speech, which evolved dependently from conscious reason according to studies based on recent findings in cognitive neuroscience, archeology, and genetics.[3] Of course, alternatively, speech may have evolved merely *after* conscious reason[4] or concurrently with it[5] or independently of it,[6] but these possibilities are now less likely. Therefore, biologically evolved conscious reason could not be merely the separate, culturally developed persuasion and rhetoric.

But even where it is still maintained that language *is* the source and cause of conceptual structure and thus of rational thought, it is only the quintessential elements in language that are so considered—syntax and "the core materials from which syntax is made" (thematic and structural relations). These are the only language elements that conceptual structure "expresses":

> What conceptual structure does not express . . . includes the linear ordering of words into sentences and the morphophonemic shapes that linguistic concepts must take on if they are going to be used communicatively between two individuals.

In other words, conceptual structure contains just those elements that are universal (Language-with-a-big-L) and excludes just those elements that are language particular.[7]

Therefore, conceptual structure, the basis of rational thought, could not express or include persuasion and rhetoric, two elements that are language particular.

Of course, one might still reject this conclusion. After all, there is much evidence that language influences perception and cognition,[8] and if one were reductively to equate (1) influence with equivalence, (2) the influencing language elements with persuasion and rhetoric, and (3) influenced perception and cognition with logic and reason, then one could still view logic and reason as merely persuasion and rhetoric. One might also claim that, even if speech, persuasion, and rhetoric *evolved* dependently from conscious reason, their subsequent influence upon it has so overwhelmed it that *now* it is merely persuasion and rhetoric. However, most (though not all) specialists on current interrelations between language and thought are committed either to such a weak conception of the dependence of thought on language or to such a weak conception of the independence of thought from language—i.e., either to the conception that "language is itself the *medium* for some thoughts and is partly constitutive of those thoughts" or to the conception that "language *facilitates* or *augments* some forms of thought"—that it "becomes unclear quite which of the two doctrines" the specialists "intended themselves to be committed to."[A]   That leaves in an equally weak condition the conception that persuasive or rhetorical language is itself the medium for some thoughts and is partly constitutive of them. But, even if one still viewed logic and reason as merely persuasion and rhetoric, viewed thus and used in argumentation, they would still make possible the "forms of sociality" that

include the peaceful resolution of conflicts, meaningful social criticism, higher education, and even self-transformation. Argumentation is the practice of a very tenuous hope that people can settle their conflicts nonviolently, that they can act differently from the way they otherwise would because they can open themselves to the dialogues that arguments are. In the process of developing this ability, a great deal more is accomplished, for this dialogue which is argumentation is finally indistinguishable from learning itself, indistinguishable from the practice of inquiry.[9]

It is not surprising, then, that both logic and reason are still used in all critical disciplines and seem to be still necessary to them. (Even in mathematics, plausible reasoning must supplement the deductive logic that might be supposed to constitute the discipline completely.[10]) Specifically,

logic and reason seem to be still necessary to theory and criticism and so must, with consistency, be accepted as necessary to interpretation too as long as interpretation is judged to be related to theory and criticism. Indeed, in contemporary rhetorical hermeneutics, reasoned argument about interpretations is accepted if not actually welcomed, for it is the raw material of that theory. Under it (according to Stanley Fish), we are not

> without rules or texts or standards or "shared points of departure and common notions of how to read." We have everything that we always had—texts, standards, norms, criteria of judgment, critical histories, etc. We can convince others that they are wrong, argue that one interpretation is better than another, cite evidence in support of the interpretations we prefer, etc.; it is just that we do all those things within a set of institutional assumptions that can themselves become the objects of dispute.[11]

Or, as expressed by more recent theorists as diverse as K.M. Newton and Steven Mailloux,

> The concept of "truth" or "validity" in interpretation should . . . be replaced by the concept of power. . . . The literary interpreter is engaged in a power struggle with other interpretations. . . . [But] power is achieved by the same methods that are used in the search for truth or validity: arguments founded on rationality, logic, the use of evidence, and so on. The only difference is the awareness that in the area of literary criticism these are usually the strongest weapons in the struggle for power.[12]

> To recognize the rhetorical politics of every interpretation, is not to avoid taking a position. Taking a position, making an interpretation, cannot be avoided.   Moreover, such historical contingency does not disable interpretive argument, because it is truly the only ground it can have. We are always arguing at particular moments in specific places to certain audiences. Our beliefs and commitments are no less real because they are historical, and the same holds for our interpretations.[13]

And even beyond such rhetorical theory that accepts reasoned argument about interpretations conditionally is other theory that accepts it unconditionally—not only deconstruction in the original, Derridean mode[14] but also theory based on work in Anglo-American analytic philosophy.   For example, James L Battersby uses studies in the philosophy of mind, category formation, and interpretation and mental representation to show that "nothing in recent literary theory (in either its hermeneutic or its cultural/historical mode) has rendered obsolete, invalid, or second-rate inquiries into authors, interpretation, intentionality, determinate meaning, [or] objective value judgments" or has subverted

"the importance, indeed the indispensability, of practical reasoning . . . to the making and understanding of literary texts."[B]