

***Beyond Rhetoric: Rhetorical Figures of Reading* by
Éva Antal. Eger: Líceum Kiadó, 2009, 157 pp.**

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In *Beyond Rhetoric: Rhetorical Figures of Reading*, Éva Antal offers a remarkable interdisciplinary analysis of rhetoric and rhetorical reading with particular focus on its links to both the philosophical and literary traditions and their concern with imagination. It is given a wide theoretical context, ranging from the ideas of classical philosophers through the theories of the sublime to the attitudes of the New Criticism and, especially, to the reevaluation of traditional western values in the critical texts of Deconstruction.

This thorough, in-depth study is developed in two comprehensive, mutually connected parts, devoted to the rhetorical theory of reading and rhetorical practice of reading, including the problem of textual understanding. The first, theoretical part of Éva Antal's analysis focuses on ethics of reading, which supports the author's emphasis on the practises of reading, the practicality of theories. In this respect, valuable insights are discovered in the deconstructive consideration of irony and its role in the rhetorical nature of the text as well as in the creative process of reading as a discourse act.

In an illuminating chapter "The Rhetoric and Ethics of Reading," the deconstructive approach is accepted as a crucial method of the study. Drawing on a wide knowledge of deconstructive authors, Éva Antal's analysis finds its key terms in Joseph Hillis Miller's study *The Ethics of Reading* and Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading or Blindness and Insight*. Éva Antal considers the pedagogical context of Miller's and de Man's reading practice, which allows her to explore the links between deconstructive criticism and the modernist view of reading. In accordance with Tobin Siebers, she points out the important role of the New Critics in the departure from the ideas of intentionalists towards the "rhetoric of the poem's autonomy," which is "a dominant force in theory to this day" (19).

In this respect, Éva Antal reveals an inspiring relation between György Lukács's idea of 'closed cultures' (*Heidelberg Aesthetics*) and de Man's distinguishing between "closed (or non) reading," "close-reading" and "the open one" (20), reflecting a gradual development of individual understanding.

With regard to the importance of individual experience (and performance) in the "act of reading or writing" (29), the study discusses the sense of responsibility inherent in the attitudes of deconstruction, creating an interesting connection between Miller's view of ethical reading (a teacher as a revealer) and

the Socratic method of *maieutika*, with the emphasis on the “questions directed by the text” (30). Accordingly, the role of a narrative is explored against the background of our ethical understanding, while the use of notions like “allegorical reading,” “ethicity” or “ethics-in-difference” points out the importance of irony: in particular, the deconstructive concept of irony as an “openness towards reality” and the “ability of shifting points of view” (30).

Another context of the discussed “rhetoric and ethics of reading” is created by the references to Miller’s deconstructive analysis of the Kantian categorical imperative.

Our attention is turned especially to the employment of the famous ‘as if’ (*als so* in German) structure that takes us to “the world of fiction” (27) to revalue the importance of imagination. The questions stimulated by the deconstructive interpretation of Kantian ethics (e.g. the question of the bridge/the chasm between the “universal law” and a “particular case”) create the heart of the following chapter, which deals with several deconstructive readings of the Kantian sublime as a “purely inward experience of consciousness”(34). The Kantian link between the moral law and the function of imagination is examined in the light of David Martyn’s imbuing the sublime with ethical relevance (38). In particular, Éva Antal interprets Martyn’s concern with “the representation of the failure to represent” to illustrate the difference between the Kantian and the romantic sublime, which recalls the ideas of Lyotard.

Deeper insights into the functions of irony and allegory are offered in the chapter devoted to the analysis of Paul de Man’s and Jacques Derrida’s texts, which also discusses the problems of memory and forgetting. The rhetoricity of language is presented through the deconstructive analysis of Romantic poetry, pointing out the power of metaphors as “the solar language of cognition” (50). Éva Antal’s discussion focuses on de Man’s interest in *prosopopeia*, developing the idea of the text as “the mirror of the interpreter” and of his “knowledge” (52). This idea is further considered in the following chapter, inspired by the myth of Pygmalion (and Narcissus), its versions and its interpretations (the themes of selfhood and otherness, of an artist and his art, of artists and those who respond to art), including de Man’s employment of the Kantian sublime.

Éva Antal’s theoretical analysis of the rhetoric becomes a stimulating starting point for her own reading and interpreting selected literary texts, ranging from Jonathan Swift’s satires to the romantic poems of William Blake and William Wordsworth. Her interpretations demonstrate the inspiring potential of the discussed deconstructive approach (e.g. the references to Wordsworth’s “rhetoric of temporality” (98)) as well as the importance of philosophical knowledge for literary studies and individual understanding of literary texts. In Éva Antal’s text, every interpretation provides new space for a wide and fruitful research. Through thorough comparative analysis, interesting links are discovered between particular rhetorical figures in different literary and cultural contexts (e.g. the motifs of flowers in Blake and Ovid, or the transformations of biblical images in Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). Accordingly, in the conclusion of her study, the author offers an amazing account of irony as a core

of the rhetoric in her discussion of Socrates, Kierkegaard and deconstructive thinkers.

Éva Antal's exceptional and profound knowledge of wide theoretical and literary sources, her ability of critical (and 'open') reading as well as elucidating difficult aesthetic and philosophical problems, and her suggestive way of expression turn our reading of her text into an exciting and greatly rewarding experience. Her study is valuable for anybody interested in classical as well as postmodern philosophy, in the fields of both aesthetics and ethics, and, last but not least, in ancient and English literature and literary interpretation. To borrow one of its crucial images (not accidentally related to the sublime), Éva Antal's writing succeeds in creating a bridge that allows us to find connections between the ideas of the past and the present, between the author's enthusiasm and our own interest in the problems under discussion between the theory and the individual experience of reading, between philosophy and literature.