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Report on the “Congress on Rhetoric: Rhetoric—Education—Innovation,” Warsaw, April 17–19, 2024

For over twenty years, the Polish Rhetoric Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Retoryczne, PTR) has worked to promote the development and integration of individuals and institutions engaged in rhetorical research, education, and practice. Researchers and practitioners associated with the PTR disseminate rhetorical knowledge, shape practical skills, and seek institutional solutions to advance this interdisciplinary field. Thanks to the efforts of the Polish Rhetoric Society, *Res Rhetorica* has emerged as a respected scientific forum and open-access journal, recognized in academic databases and included on the ministerial list. Therefore, the *Congress on Rhetoric: Rhetoric—Education—Innovation* was an excellent opportunity to celebrate over two decades of continuous work in popularizing rhetoric, gaining experience, and sharing knowledge.

The Congress sessions were held at the NYX Hotel in downtown Warsaw and at the University of Warsaw. Each day featured plenary sessions with keynote lectures, thematic section proceedings, and events promoting rhetoric and bringing together the community of rhetoric enthusiasts. The event began with an opening ceremony, followed by the first plenary lecture by Petra Aczél (Moholy-Nagy University of Arts

and Design, MOME—Budapest, Hungary) titled *Humanizing the Future—Rhetoric as a Key Skill for the Future*. In her talk, Aczél addressed the uncertainty and rapid changes in contemporary society. She introduced the concept of "future shock," describing the challenges that the future holds. Aczél pointed out that the right skills, particularly rhetorical ones, are key for enabling individuals not only to survive but also to thrive in these new conditions. Her insights underscored the fundamental role of communication in confronting future challenges and the importance of developing rhetorical skills as a key factor in preparing for an unpredictable world.

The thematic sections were organized around key rhetorical concepts: *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*. Importantly, the Congress facilitated the exchange of international experiences, as it featured participants from Poland and abroad (Denmark, Hungary, USA). The first day's discussions were centered around a range of topics, including *Teaching Rhetoric: International Perspectives*, *Rhetoric and Visuality*, *Rhetoric: From Antiquity to the Present*, *Rhetoric across Dimensions*, *Rhetorical Case Studies*. On the same day, young researchers were offered two workshops: one on writing scientific papers with elements of rhetoric, led by the President of the Polish Rhetoric Society, Maria Załęska, and another on self-presentation in academic work, conducted by Anna M. Kielbiewska (University of Warsaw). Participants navigated the event through a meticulously prepared program and book of abstracts. It is worth noting that this form of academic communication not only served as an excellent guide during the event but also facilitated networking after the Congress.

The first day concluded with a plenary lecture by Prof. Dietmar Till (University of Tübingen, Germany) titled *Digital Rhetoric Training in the 21st Century: Presentation of Two Projects Implemented in Tübingen*. His talk centered on two key rhetorical initiatives in which the professor has been involved over the past few years: the *Virtual Rhetoric* project at the University of Tübingen and the Tübingen GmbH Rhetoric Academy, which he co-founded. The lecture discussed the role of technology in teaching rhetoric and illustrated the evolving technological context of rhetorical *actio*.

The second day began with a presentation of findings from the report *Rhetoric in Poland: An Overview of Didactics and Rhetorical Research*,

led by Prof. Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca (University of Warsaw). This report provided an in-depth examination of rhetoric research and education across 20 universities, offering valuable insights into the state of rhetorical studies in Polish academia. The conclusions highlighted the diversity and scope of rhetorical research, serving as a key reference for further discussions on the development and future of the discipline in Poland. The plenary session featured a lecture by Prof. Lisa S. Villadsen titled *Citizenship as Rhetorical Practice*. In her talk, Prof. Villadsen argued for the centrality of the concept of citizenship in rhetorical education, and presented the concept of rhetorical citizenship as key to understanding public engagement. She described rhetorical citizenship as a discursive way of "creating" society and emphasized that placing rhetoric at the heart of civic dynamics allows us to analyze how public discourse shapes civic norms and how members of society both realize and challenge ideas of democratic citizenship. The professor also stressed the importance of critical thinking—sharpened through rhetorical studies—particularly in the current age of disinformation.

The following topics were addressed in the thematic sections: *Rhetoric and Concepts of Language*, *PANEL Ret-Net: Rhetoric and Didactics—Between Mother Tongue and Foreign Languages*, *Didactic Dimensions of Rhetoric*, *Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Rhetoric*, and *Teaching Rhetoric Through Debate*. In the *elocutio* section, titled *Rhetoric as Equipment for Life in Society*, an Oxford-style debate was showcased. The debate's thesis was: "The proliferation of tools based on generative artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT, is doing more harm than good to students." This event demonstrated the potential of using the Oxford debate format in educational settings, and emphasized the importance of building an educational future that promotes an informed and critical approach not only to new technologies. The Oxford debate, as a teaching tool, helps students develop rhetorical, critical thinking, and argumentation skills.

In organizing the debate, members of the Polish Rhetoric Society (PTR) collaborated with the Educational Projects Foundation and the Krakow Speakers Association. The session was conducted in a hybrid format, and teachers were invited to participate in the discussion. The judges—Paweł

Gondek (KUL), Jakub Pstrąg (UJ), Marcin Będkowski (UW), Jan Piosik (FPE), Anna Kulma (KSM), Anna Stelmach (KSM), Karolina Kolbuszewska (FPE), and Kinga J. Rogowska (FPE/UW)—faced the formidable task of selecting the winning side, as both teams excelled in their roles and presented compelling arguments. Ultimately, the opposition team emerged victorious, though the real success lay with the audience, which gained valuable knowledge from the debaters. The afternoon panel session, held at the University of Warsaw, featured a presentation of the results of the *RHEFINE* project, which was conducted under the Erasmus+ program from 2020 to 2022. The project aimed to integrate rhetoric with modern teaching methods to meet contemporary educational needs. It was a joint venture between the Applied Rhetoric Laboratory at the University of Warsaw, the Department of Theoretical and Applied Phonetics at the University of Zagreb, and the Institute of Rhetoric and Communication in Sofia.

The project has developed digital teaching materials and curricula that integrate the theoretical foundations of rhetoric with practical application. Academic textbooks have also been produced, covering topics such as rhetorical criticism and the didactics of rhetoric, providing valuable resources for students, researchers, and educators alike. The outcomes of the *RHEFINE* project push the boundaries of rhetorical studies and open new avenues for future research and educational initiatives in the field. As part of the panel, two researchers affiliated with the project delivered presentations: Elenmari Pletikos Olof (University of Zagreb) spoke on *Overview of Rhetorical Research in Croatia*, and Diana Tomić (University of Zagreb) presented *Rhetorical Education in the 21st Century: Bridging the Gap*. The presentation of the book *Debate: Rhetoric for Democracy* (PWN 2024) summarized the practical aspects of the congress, pointing out specific applications of rhetorical research in the context of debates and democratic dialogue. This monograph is a valuable contribution to the practical application of rhetorical studies.

The ceremonial highlight of the second day was the announcement of the results from the Fifth Contest of the Polish Rhetoric Society for the Best Thesis Incorporating Rhetoric. The winner was Julia Drużkowska from the Faculty of Neophilology at the University of Warsaw, recognized for

her master's thesis, *Persuadere All'uguaglianza Di Genere. Un Paragone Delle Campagne Promozionali Delle Università Italiane E Francesi* [Persuading Gender Equality. A Comparative Study of Promotional Campaigns in Italian and French Universities], supervised by Maria Załęska. In the undergraduate thesis category, Anita Londzin from the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Silesia received an honorable mention for her work titled *Complaint of a Wronged Husband: A Critical Edition of a 17th-Century Sejmik Speech*, written under the supervision of Maria Barłowska.

The final day began with deliberations in sessions titled *Concepts of Teaching Rhetoric in an Academic Context*, *Rhetoric*, *Critical Thinking*, *Argumentation*, *Rhetoric and Didactics: Teaching the Mother Tongue*. The plenary lecture, *Rhetoric. Education. Innovation. Discussion Remarks*, was delivered by Professor Jakub Z. Lichański, co-organizer and first president of the Polish Rhetoric Society. In his talk, the esteemed scholar of rhetoric in Poland discussed literature on rhetoric, rhetorical criticism, and education, noting their application within academic institutions. Concluding his remarks, Professor Lichański asserted that introducing rhetoric as a theory of text and argumentation into education is both inevitable and necessary—a conclusion that emerged clearly from the three-day discussions at the Congress. The final event of the Congress was a roundtable discussion, moderated by Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca (University of Warsaw), which focused on innovations in rhetoric education, rhetorical competence in various academic contexts, the development of rhetoric as a discipline, and its societal perception. Experts Paweł Gondek (Catholic University of Lublin), Jakub Pstrąg (Jagiellonian University), Magdalena Ryszka-Kurczab (KEN University), and Bartosz Hordecki (Adam Mickiewicz University) shared their insights and reflections, with Hordecki's poetic conclusion providing a fitting rhetorical close to this excellent scientific event.

The three-day Congress on Rhetoric was replete with significant academic and public outreach activities. The formation of citizenship is inseparable from effective and ethical communication. While the methods and channels of communication have changed over the centuries, the principles of building understanding and community have remained constant.

Rhetoric equips us with the tools for developing critical thinking, distinguishing fact from opinion, assessing the quality of argumentation, and recognizing the boundaries between persuasion and manipulation. The opportunity to engage in scholarly discussions on rhetoric, exchange academic and teaching experiences, and inspire rhetorical action were invaluable outcomes of this first comprehensive gathering of rhetoric scholars and enthusiasts. Designed to catalyze significant change in everyday communication, media development, and civic engagement in Poland and beyond, the inaugural Congress on Rhetoric appears to have successfully fulfilled these objectives.

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