

Rhetoric of Leadership

Retoryka przywództwa

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SPRAWOZDANIE/REPORT

ANNA BENDRAT

UNIwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie
anna.bendrat@gmail.com

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On May 22-24, 2019, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland, hosted the international conference *Media in America, America in Media*. The event under the patronage of the Polish Rhetoric Society drew media scholars from 16 universities from Europe and the United States representing various scholarly disciplines – from American Studies and linguistics to political science and journalism. The conference served as the interdisciplinary platform for the discussion on the contemporary media phenomena, such as fake news, representations of international crises and cultural events, augmented reality and rhetoric of political speeches. The details of the event, including the programme with the book of abstracts and the media coverage, are now available on the conference website at mediainamerica.umcs.pl.

Alongside the main conference sessions, two keynote lectures enriched the programme of the conference. On May 23, Prof. Kris Rutten from Ghent University in Belgium, currently serving as the Chairman of the Rhetoric Society of Europe, gave the lecture on “Rhetoric as Equipment for Living”. Referring to Kenneth Burke’s theory of dramatism, Prof. Rutten explored if and how rhetoric can still be relevant in an increasingly media-saturated knowledge society that is continuously in transition and that is becoming ever more complex and paradoxical by political, economic and cultural differences on a global scale. On May 24, Prof. Jerzy Kutnik from the Department of American Literature and Culture at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, discussed how popular music reflected on broader cultural transformations when rock’n’roll ruled the world. He did not so much refer to specific examples of popular songs but rather demonstrated how the awareness of the significance and impact of the news media – here exemplified by the press – was signaled by songwriters during the 1960s and 1970s – when societies and

nations were entangled in upheavals which shook and transformed private lives, public institutions and artistic production.

However the highlight of the conference, which preceded the whole event, was the initiative launched by the Polish Rhetoric Society which was directed towards the young scholars pursuing media studies within the framework of rhetorical criticism. Thus the first edition of the International Workshop on Rhetorical Criticism took place on May 22, 2019 at the Faculty of Humanities at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. The organizers of the event were: the Department of Applied Rhetoric at the Faculty of Philosophy of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, the Department of English Studies at the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Social Communication at the Faculty of Political Sciences of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. The honorary patronage of the workshop was assumed by Zdzisław Antoń, the Chairman of the Board of the Lublin Province.

The workshops met with great interest of doctoral and graduate students dealing in their research with the issues of persuasive discourse in the public sphere, including Polish and world politics, media and culture. Due to the interactive format of the event, nine applicants received the invitation, including two from abroad. The participants represented the following centers: San Diego State University, USA; Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv; Jagiellonian University, Cracow; University of Łódź; University of Opole; Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin; John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (3 participants from the MA programme in Applied Rhetoric).

The workshop was inaugurated by the Honorary Guest, Professor Kris Rutten, who gave a lecture on “Rhetorical Criticism as a Methodological Framework”, highlighting the broad range of rhetorical methods for the study of contemporary media and culture phenomena. Next, the participants of the workshops presented their research projects related to the analysis of persuasive discourse from the areas of politics, media and culture. The spectrum of research topics was very wide, ranging from the analysis of blogs by Polish politicians and speeches of the US President Donald Trump, to considerations on the mechanisms of fake news detection and video games analysis. Much space has been devoted to the practical use of rhetorical tools, for example in the practice of mediation and during the instruction for the Oxford debates format.

Since the design of the workshop required all the participants to get familiar with all nine featured projects prior to the event, the ensuing feedback session was the most valuable part of the workshop in the opinions shared by the participants afterwards. Apart from answering the questions from other participants (which had also been shared prior to the event), the young rhetorical scholars had the

opportunity to listen to the commentary and the advice on their projects from Prof. Kris Rutten, but also from the faculty members representing the Polish Rhetoric Society, including Prof. Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska from the University of Opole, dr Elżbieta Pawlak-Hejno and dr Anna Bendrat from Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. At the end of the workshop, the participants received the certificates commemorating their contribution to the first International Workshop on Rhetorical Criticism, and, as a nice follow-up, continued their networking in a more informal way over pizza and drinks.

In the opinions expressed by the participants of the first edition of the rhetorical workshops, it was a very successful event, which has already resulted in a more tangible benefit in the form of a networking group called “Workshop 22” bringing together the participants who were present in Lublin and who can now exchange information on the academic enterprises and events relating to the topics of their interest. What the idea of the workshop has also demonstrated is that learning is derived both from individual research, but, most of all, from personal interaction with other scholars. Therefore, as the representatives of the Polish Rhetoric Society, we do hope to be able to make such workshops our cyclical events. It is our firm belief that promoting inclusive and sustainable space for early career rhetorical scholars to present their work and receive valuable feedback may in the long run foster greater recognition and popularity of rhetoric as a well-grounded discipline in the academic circles.