

Rhetoric in Mexico Retoryka w Meksyku

11 (3) 2024

ISSUE EDITORS: GERARDO RAMÍREZ VIDAL, MARÍA ALEJANDRA VITALE, AGNIESZKA KAMPKA, MARTA KOBYLKA

GERARDO RAMÍREZ VIDAL

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO, MEXICO

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2060-3872>

grvidal18@gmail.com

MARÍA ALEJANDRA VITALE

UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2746-4070>

alejandravitale@filo.uba.ar

AGNIESZKA KAMPKA

WARSAW UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES, POLAND

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9732-6482>

agnieszka_kampka@sggw.edu.pl

MARTA KOBYLKA

UNIVERSITY OF RZESZOW, POLAND

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0355-790X>

mkobylska@ur.edu.pl

Rhetoric in Mexico – a foreword

Retoryka w Meksyku – wprowadzenie

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GERARDO RAMÍREZ VIDAL

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO, MEXICO

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2060-3872>

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Rhetoric in Mexico – a foreword

As in other Western countries, in Mexico the study of rhetoric and its application to text analysis has spread to many fields: from ancient rhetoric to graphic design, from figures to argumentation, from sermons to scientific essays. Numerous disciplines such as literature, philosophy, linguistics, pragmatics, semiotics, hermeneutics, and law have intervened in it, so much so that the boundaries of this discipline have expanded randomly and the word “rhetoric” has been understood in various ways, without considering the common negative meanings such as verbiage or unsupported statements.

1. Classical Rhetoric

From 1982 at the Center for Classical Studies of the Institute of Philological Research (IIFl) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), a group of young researchers under the direction of Paola Vianello (1939-2007) has devoted themselves to the study and translation of Attic orators (in particular Andocides, Isocrates, Lysias and Demosthenes), Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, and other Greek rhetoricians such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Longinus. Close ties were established with professors from Spain who taught courses at the aforementioned university, in particular Antonio López Eire and Carmen Codoñer, as well as with philosopher Livio Rossetti from the University of Perugia, Italy.

From this arose a philological and philosophical current of rhetorical studies based on ancient Greek and Roman orators and oriented towards forensic rhetoric.

Among the publications, we can mention Lysias' *On the murder of Eratosthenes. Defense* with introduction, translation and notes by Vianello (Lysias 1980, cf. Vianello 1990, 2004, 2007), López Eire's *Essence and Object of Rhetoric* (1996, cf. 2000, 2005), and Gerardo Ramírez Vidal's *The Rhetoric of Antiphon* (2000). Likewise, conferences, seminars, and courses of a philological nature on political rhetoric in classical Greece were organized. Subsequent studies have been characterized by attachment to tradition and their application to discourse analysis.

Other researchers from the Center for Classical Studies undertook important work in the translation and study of ancient rhetoric. Translations and studies of Cicero's works on rhetoric carried out by Bulmaro Reyes Coria stand out: *Rhetoric in Cicero's Oratorical Partition* (1987), *Limits of Classical Rhetoric* (1995), *About Invention* (1997), *On Oratorical Partition* (2002), and *Topics* (2006). In addition, Amparo Gaos translated *About the Orator* and published *Cicero and Eloquence* and José Quiñones Melgoza translated *The Supreme Model of Speakers*.¹

Important studies on New Spanish rhetoric have been done by Ignacio Osorio Romero (1980), Arturo Ramírez Trejo (2012), who also translated Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (2002), Quiñones Melgoza (2012), Julio Pimentel Álvarez, who translated the *Christian Rhetoric of Friar Diego Valadés* (2019), and the works of Mauricio Beuchot on Aristotelian and New Spanish rhetoric (1995, 1996, 1998, 2007).

In the College of Classical Literature of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the UNAM, other projects have been developed around Latin rhetoric by María de Lourdes Santiago and around Renaissance rhetoric by Leticia López Serratos and her group. In the same College, the chair of Classical Rhetoric and Poetics was established. In other universities in the states of Mexico, classical rhetoric and its tradition are studied. Joaquín Rodríguez Beltrán from the University of Guadalajara already has an abundant production.

2. Rhetoric and Poetics

Another predominant trend in Mexico is that related to poetics and literature. In the second half of the 20th century, the study and dissemination of rhetoric occurred mainly in the field of literature, under the influence of Russian formalists and French structuralists (among others Tzvetan Todorov, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Roman Jakobson, Gérard Genette), as well as the members of the Group μ (including Jacques Dubois, Francis Edeline, Jean-Marie Klinkenberg, Philippe Minguet).

The main point of irradiation of this literary-semiotic orientation of rhetoric was the Seminar (now Center) of Poetics of the Institute of Philological Research

1. All of Cicero's works on rhetoric have been translated at the UNAM. The bibliography does not include these publications for reasons of brevity.

of the UNAM and its main promoter Helena Beristáin (1927-2013) who published seminal works such as the *Dictionary of Rhetoric and Poetics* (1985; seventh edition in 1995), the *Structural Analysis of the Literary Narrative* (1982) and projected the publication of the collection *Bitácora de Retórica* whose first volume appeared in 1996 and number 41 in 2024. Among the titles of this collection many refer to the branch of rhetoric, such as number 18: *Figures, Knowledge, Culture: Rhetorical Essays* (2003). Under her leadership, numerous courses, conferences, and diploma courses devoted to rhetoric were held, involving numerous scholars from Mexico and abroad. Thanks to this work of dissemination, literary rhetoric studies continue to have an important place in Mexico today. In addition, individual works should be highlighted. At the Center of Poetics, other scholars have followed various orientations on rhetoric, such as argumentation in language (Luisa Puig) and the sermon in New Spain (Ana Castaño).

Regarding the application of rhetoric in the field of literature, the projects directed by Lillian von der Walde stand out. She is an academic from the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM), Iztapalapa campus, Mexico City. Among her many publications, we should highlight her book as editor *Rhetoric Applied to Medieval and Sixteenth-Seventeenth-Century Literature* (2016, cf. von der Walde 2016), the product of a conference she organized. This type of study is widespread in the states of the republic.

3. Forensic and Jurisdictional Rhetoric

At the UNAM Faculty of Law, the Legal Rhetoric and Argumentation Group has already organized thirteen colloquia on legal rhetoric. Its members have published several books and articles and participated in academic meetings. It is worth highlighting the publication of two collective books, *Essays on Legal Rhetoric* (2019) and *Forensic Oratory and Legal Debate* (2024), and Carlos Martínez Loza's work entitled *Introduction to Legal Rhetoric* (2023). There are two mandatory rhetoric courses at the Faculty of Law.

In the same field of law, the Superior Court of Justice of Mexico City has organized the National Conference on Jurisdictional Rhetoric since 2016. Following a classic orientation, the first conferences addressed the issues of *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos*. The fourth one held in 2021 dealt with "The validity of Quintilian in jurisdictional argumentation." In addition, courses have been taught and studies on jurisdictional rhetoric have been published.

Currently, the International Seminar on Rhetoric and Law is being held with the participation of academic organizers from universities in Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil.

4. Rhetoric and Philosophy

Rhetoric has had close ties to philosophy throughout Western history. From Plato and Aristotle to modern studies it was related to critical thinking. Something has already been said about Greek philosophy, but it is necessary to add the studies that are currently carried out on thinkers such as Juan Caramuel and Lobkowitz (1606-1682), Giambattista Vico, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michael Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and others in books and essays such as Érika Lindig's *Philosophy of the Word. Essays on Vico, Humboldt and the Criticism of Discourses* (2024), which is a product of the project "Rhetoric and Philosophy in Discourse Studies" coordinated by Lindig, Ana María Martínez de la Escalera, and Ramírez Vidal.

In this category, studies on hermeneutics and semiotics that integrate rhetoric as their object of study and that are carried out within the field of argumentation or linked to it may be registered. In this case, the work of Julieta Haidar from the National School of Anthropology and History, around whom a group of scholars has gathered, should be highlighted. Rhetoric is considered one of the materialities of semiotics. In this case, one of the greatest contributions is that of Pedro Reygadas entitled *The Art of Arguing: Meaning, Form, Dialogue and Persuasion* (2022), although it touches on rhetoric in a lateral way.

In the field of argumentation, the Institute of Philological Research of the UNAM, the departments of the University of Guadalajara, of the autonomous universities of Mexico City, and of the states of Nayarit, Aguascalientes, Chiapas, and San Luis Potosí annually organize the International Colloquium on Argumentation and Rhetoric. In particular, the scholars of Academic Body of Rhetoric, Logic and Theory of Argumentation, among whom Fernando Leal should be mentioned, have studied the problems of rhetorical argumentation for more than two decades.

5. Rhetoric and Communication

Rhetoric is a form of communication, perhaps the most important if we think of the effectiveness or the effects it produces regarding the recipient or the influence it has on the way of thinking and acting of both the sender and the receiver. Therefore, journalism is presented as a field of rhetoric if it is oriented towards persuasion or the effects a journalistic narrative or argumentative texts can produce in social and political matters. The very expression "fourth power" that is given to journalism shows that its function is persuasive, guiding souls and constitutes to a very interesting genre to which the precepts of the rhetorical system can be applied, especially those related to evidence and style. Juan Nadal Palazón, a researcher at the IIFL Hermeneutics Seminar, has been the one who has studied this orientation.

6. Rhetoric and Design

The initiatives have gone beyond verbal language and have been oriented towards image, music, cinema, and design. It would be worth highlighting the aspects of non-verbal rhetorics in academic meetings and publications, such as the collective book entitled *Rhetorics Verbal and Non-Verbal* (1997) and the book by Rubén López Cano entitled *Music and Rhetoric in the Baroque* (2000). In the case of graphic design, Alejandro Tapia, Gerardo Kloss and other academics from the UAM have presented innovative initiatives, which have converged in projects and publications of articles and books, such as Alejandro Tapia's *Graphic Design in the Social Space* (2004) or *Essays on Rhetoric and Design* (2011) compiled by Luis Antonio Rivera Díaz.

7. The Mexican Association of Rhetoric (AMR)

It is natural that all these activities have resulted in the creation of working groups. Some very active groups have already been mentioned, but a review would be incomplete without mentioning the creation of the Mexican Association of Rhetoric (AMR) in 2014, currently under the direction of Juan Nadal Palazón. The AMR is part of the Latin American Association of Rhetoric (ALR) and the Ibero-American Organization of Rhetoric (OIR). But there are other organizations and groups that address rhetoric, such as the Legal Rhetoric and Argumentation Group, the Mexican Association of Classical Studies (AMEC), Mundo Novohispano Association, the active group Otherness and Exclusions (Alteridad y exclusiones) around de la Escalera, Lindig, and Armando Villegas. Among the journals, the University of Guadalajara publishes *Quadripartita Ratio* and the Interdisciplinary Center for Research in Humanities of the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos edits *Discourse Studies (Estudios del Discurso)*.

8. Balance

In the above outline, we can see that, qualitatively, rhetoric has developed vigorously in Mexico with classical and literary tendencies predominating. In any case, it can be observed that it has moved from political genres (deliberative, epideictic, and judicial) to other discursive species, such as the sermon or journalism, and to non-verbal rhetoric, such as music or cinema, so that its limits have expanded without apparent substantial relationships. The main problem is that a defined link has been diluted. Other rhetorics have been invented that have little to do with the classical one, although they seem to have a common foundation of the figurative processes and the argumentative aspects which are the pillars of ancient rhetoric. However, two phenomena seem to limit (or innovate) modern rhetorical

studies. On the one hand, they do not have a creative or productive function, but are generally limited to the analysis of figures and arguments in discourse or non-verbal texts; on the other hand, they are studied from very diverse points of view, but not from the strictly rhetorical-persuasive one, going beyond the narrow margins to which both figures (ornamental function) and arguments have been subjected. The biggest problem is that this expansion of rhetorical studies distances them from what is strictly rhetorical. However, this situation is not typical of Mexico, but of Latin American countries in general.

It is regrettable that a properly Latin American orientation has not been created in relation to these studies, as has happened with philosophy, whose function is decolonizing, that is, breaking with the Eurocentrism that has imposed a unique way of understanding the world. However, rhetoric potentially has the possibility, if not to deconstruct, at least to apply refutative methods to contemporary dogmas, as Gorgias seems to have done in relation to the dogmas concerning being, knowledge, and language.

An Outline of Rhetoric in Mexico

1. Nahuatl Rhetoric

If we consider rhetoric in a broad sense as the teaching of discourse, there was a significant development in Mexico during ancient times in different cultural areas. There is data on this subject about Nahuatl culture thanks to the testimonies that Friar Bernardino de Sahagún recorded in his work *General History of the Things of New Spain*, composed between 1553 and 1585. In book VI, entitled “Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy,” the enormous attention that was given to the spoken word and its teaching is recorded. The famous *huehuetlahtolli* or speeches of the ancestors based on which oratory was taught are preserved. The highest ruler is given the title of Huey Tlahtoani, that is, “Great Orator” (cf. Ramírez Vidal 2021).

With the destruction of the Mexica Empire (1521), the religious orders, the Catholic hierarchy, and the viceregal government introduced a new education for the children descended from the old indigenous nobility, aimed at establishing the Catholic religion and a new colonialist rhetoric that subjected the *ethos* of courage and pride to the *ethos* of obedience and the repudiation of ancestral customs. Indigenous education did not disappear and even now continues through customs and traditions in the native peoples and in community practices of very diverse kinds. Very soon schools began to be established for the education of the children of the conquerors and of the Spaniards who came to these lands in search of fortune.

2. Rhetoric in New Spain

The European rhetorical tradition in America began after the conquest of Mexico, first with texts written by the conquerors (such as the accounts of merits and services) and with the evangelizing activity of the friars through sermons, and later with teaching for the children and young people of the new ruling class. It was a rhetoric transplanted from Europe to America for European emigrants or those born in the new lands. The *praecepta* remained the same as those of the old world, sometimes colored with local circumstantial elements, but without substantial changes. The most important figure of the New Spain period was the Franciscan Friar Diego Valadés who published in Italy the *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579), a work that contains numerous doctrines on the elements of ecclesiastical rhetoric added with references to the indigenous people about whom numerous works have been written both in Mexico and abroad (e.g. Abbott 1996). However, this is not an original work but rather a compilation of texts from rhetorical treatises from the 16th century.

Initially, the rhetorical treatises and the teachers came from Spain and over time some works were published in New Spain, purged of elements harmful to young Creoles (Osorio Romero, 1980, 96). Particularly important were the Jesuits, who instituted the *Ratio studiorum* in their schools until their expulsion in 1767, although this model of study continued to be applied during the following century. In addition, the academic rhetoric which developed at the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico was of great importance to the scholarly elite. The University was founded in 1553 and its first professor of rhetoric was Francisco Cervantes de Salazar. Works on rhetoric by European and Creole authors were printed in Mexico. Some manuscript treatises are preserved. Osorio Romero managed to recover thirty-two manuscripts, fifteen of them on rhetoric, although only three seemed of interest to him (1980, 115, and 119). In any case, all the works on rhetoric are based on European authors. Among the most influential works can be counted that of Cipriano Suárez, first published in Lisbon in 1553, but then reprinted a hundred times in the following century. In 1621 this work was reprinted in Mexico.

The most important genre of the entire period was the sermon, which predominated in all discursive spheres, both religious and political. The influence of the Portuguese Friar (I would say he was Brazilian) Antonio Vieira was particularly intense, from whom numerous works were imported and spread in the seventeenth century. Other genres that had some importance in Mexico were epistolography, thanks to manuals such as *De conscribendis epistolis* by Erasmus of Rotterdam, or history, whose greatest representative was Francisco Xavier Clavijero (1780) who wrote an impressive work in Italy entitled *Storia antica del Messico*.

The classical rhetoric of Greece and Rome had little impact during the colonial period, because the political conditions for its development did not exist. For example, there was no parliamentary rhetoric, because there was no parliament. Epideictic speeches were replaced by the sermon, which was applied above all to the lives of saints. Forensic oratory, which was taught in canons in the colleges of the orders and which was regulated in the civil codes, had a greater impact.

3. The 19th Century, Zenith of Oratory, and Rhetoric

Classical rhetoric was slowly introduced in independent Mexico, particularly the sermon in civic affairs. Different political groups felt the need to adapt to the discursive conditions that arose with the Independence of Mexico in 1810. Great deliberative orators began to appear in Cadiz to participate in constitutional debates regarding the 1815 Constitution of Apatzingán and the Federal Constitution of 1824. The practice continued until the great debates of the constituent assembly in 1857 where parliamentary rhetoric exploded with great orators. The deliberative practice lasted for decades until the establishment of the silent rooms of the Porfirian period. But all political life at its various levels was driven by the debates on the destiny of the nation. Forensic rhetoric had its golden age from 1869 to 1929, due to the establishment of jury courts in that period. Epideictic oratory also expanded with patriotic speeches and civic orations.

From the beginning of the 19th century, with the freedom of the press, journalism became increasingly important and eventually became the forum for major national problems, although also a means of defending the established power. For example, newspapers *La Libertad* and *El Imparcial* carried out a laudatory activity of the Porfirio Díaz regime, compared to critical newspapers such as *El Diario del Hogar* or *Regeneración* published by the Flores Magón brothers, imprisoned several times for exercising the freedom of the press.

4. Alfonso Reyes

The long period of the Porfirio Díaz government (1877-1880 and 1884-1911) largely silenced political oratory and rhetoric became more academic, although the teaching and practice of forensic eloquence continued during the first three decades of the 20th century. The Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910 and lasted a decade, gave rise to a new rhetoric of epideictic character with the exaltation of the national heroes of independence and revolution (Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, and others), the national holidays and the presidential oratory that appealed to the *ethos* of the ruling party and resorted to the *pathos* of gratitude (*kharis*) to the regime and calm (*parotês*). However, parliamentary discourse was silenced and forensic rhetoric disappeared in the face of a regime that became

increasingly authoritarian. The teaching and practice of political discourse was limited to the ruling elite. Then came the great work of the polymath Alfonso Reyes who offered a course in rhetoric at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature in 1942 and published *Ancient Rhetoric* in the same year. The work contains an exposition on the development of rhetoric in Greece and Rome and a description of the structure of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Cicero's *On the Orator* and *Orator*, and Quintilian's *Institution of Oratory*. The work resembles an oasis in the desert and can be considered either a precedent for the flourishing of rhetorical studies at the end of the 20th century or the last fruit of the previous rhetoric, though it is rather a manifestation of the universal character of the thought of Alfonso Reyes, written before the art was reborn in Europe with the new paths that would be given to it by the works of Chaïm Perelman, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, Stephen Toulmin or the Liège Group, Heinrich Lausberg, and others. Compared to the European works cited, Reyes' *Ancient Rhetoric* represents an attempt at a genuine recovery of the *ratio dicendi* of ancient Greeks and Romans, an orientation currently predominant in Mexico, without detracting from the new currents of discourse analysis.

In This Issue

This issue presents three texts that speak directly to the theme of rhetoric in Mexico.

Gerardo Ramírez Vidal's article provides an overview of rhetoric in Mexico from colonial times to the 19th century. For the Novo-Hispanic period, he dedicates special interest to the sermon, since it played a leading role as an oratorical genre. Then he refers to rhetoric and oratory in the 19th century. In political rhetoric, the figures of Manuel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, the parliamentarians who drafted the 1824 and 1827 Constitutions, and later orators such as Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, known as the Mexican Danton, stand out in the context of the political struggle. During the period of the triumph of the liberals, civic orations and patriotic speeches stand out, such as those of Gabino Barreda, Agustín Aragón, and Agustín Álvarez Castillo. After a brief mention of forensic rhetoric, Ramírez Vidal devotes himself to the education of Mexican orators and the various institutions where they acquired the art of effective speech.

Wiesław Czechowski's article offers a rhetorical analysis of Mexican President Andrés Obrador's speech on the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the expropriation of oil. The article highlights formal-compositional components, as well as semantic and argumentative procedures that form the foundation of rhetorical impact. The text opens with a presentation of the political context in which the speech was drafted and delivered and of President Obrador as a politician and a speaker.

The presentation is followed by a discussion of the speech as a major presidential address and of the links between the speech and the Mexican rhetorical tradition. The analysis exposes the speech as multithreaded with a factual dominance accompanied by a persuasively significant emotive-value component. It shows the president as a skillful and strategic speaker, able to use the anniversary of the nationalization of the oil industry to popularize his political initiatives, programs, and activities.

The article by Teresa Maria Włosowicz, after commenting on the relationship between music and rhetoric, with emphasis on songs, analyzes rhetorical appeals in the lyrics of sixteen songs by contemporary Mexican singer and composer Lila Downs. Her study starts from the following questions: what rhetorical appeals can be identified in the lyrics; how are logos, pathos, and ethos expressed in the lyrics of the songs analyzed here; to what extent can such lyrics be regarded as potential means of persuasion and to what extent are they simply expressive texts which mainly serve to evoke particular emotions? The lyrics which appeal to reason are classified as logos, those which appeal to the listeners' emotions represent pathos, and those which are based on character, including the idealized characters of historical figures as well as traits associated with the Mexican cultural ethos, are classified as ethos. At the same time, the author contemplates the complex interaction between ethos, logos, and pathos.

The Varia section presents four texts, three of which deal with ancient rhetoric: Krzysztof Narecki examines the memory (*mneme*) in Gorgias' "Defense of Palamedes," Krystyna Tuszyńska investigates funeral speech (*epitaphios logos*) in Plato's "Menexenus," and Miklos Könczöl studies the issues (*staseis*) in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis and Robert Westerfelhaus examine paratexts of cookbooks in the context of contemporary American food culture.

The Report section covers Marta Kobylska's summary of the 4th International Rhetoric Workshop hosted by the University of Dubrovnik in Croatia from June 18th to the 20th of 2024.

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