

## RECENSION

by Prof. Velichko Rumenchev

on an announced competition for the academic position "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR" - by order of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

In the competition for associate professor in professional field 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric), announced in the State Gazette no. 103 from 10.12.2021, participates one candidate – chief assistant prof. Dr. Donka Gencheva Petrova from the Department of Rhetoric of the Faculty of Philosophy of the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University.

Chief assistant professor Dr. Donka Gencheva Petrova meets all requirements for taking up the academic position of *Associate Professor*, according to the Rules of Procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She has acquired the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", has held the academic position "chief assistant professor" for nine years and is currently a staff lecturer at the Department of Rhetoric of the Faculty of Philosophy at the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University.

She is a serious specialist with proven scientific achievements in the field concerned. She has presented authored by her scientific work,

which does not repeat the materials presented for the acquisition of her PhD. She has presented other original research papers and publications and has not reached the age of 65.

I would not want to rank the papers and publications which the candidate has submitted for this competition, and even less to list them. I can only point out that their volume and depth of research impress me. Among the numerous publications, thirty-three in total number (23 submitted for participation in the contest), in Bulgarian and English, by Donka Gencheva Petrova, I will pay main attention to her monograph "Audience - Analysis and Rhetorical Impact" (2021, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski").

The topic of the habilitation work is of great interest to the field of rhetoric. There is hardly a topic more significant than the audience, which is why there does not seem to be a rhetorical work, or even a lecture that goes without, to a greater or lesser extent, discussing the audience. Even back in time with Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, we see an emphasis on the listener, that is, the audience. Whatever is done or needs to be done is in order to impact the audience. Therefore, in the first place it can be said that the topic is extremely significant and constantly relevant - from the emergence of rhetoric as a theory to this very day.

Secondly, Dr. Donka Petrova is definitely a pioneer in this voluminous, of course not comprehensive, study of the audience from the positions of rhetoric. This cannot, and probably should not, be done in one publication. The quality of the work is clearly influenced

by the psychological education of the author. Modern rhetoric is interdisciplinary, but psychological knowledge is what gives it this position to the largest extent nowadays. In this case, the depth of the study is, in my opinion, definitely determined by the special knowledge of the author.

The monograph itself, with a large enough volume - 372 pages, divided into introduction and ten chapters, does, we can say without exaggeration, offer a complete enough and multifaceted dissection of the audience. The audience is viewed from a variety of possible aspects. The author demonstrates serious level of competence regarding the existing theoretical basis. It starts with Perelman and Argumentation Theory and different types of audiences (Chapter 1) and logically stretches out to the other leading theories in the field of audiences. The interdisciplinary analytical approach to audience research is consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of today's rhetoric. Dr. Donka Petrova not only demonstrates serious theoretical competence, but also shows her ability to apply the theory in clarifying problems from the practice. Fundamental categories such as Ethos, Pathos, Logos, coming to us from the ancient rhetoric, find their place in the study in separate chapters, but not viewed separately, but in the context of the speaker-audience interaction, and especially in their argumentative aspect – like reference to authority, good character, good will, logic, nonverbal manifestations in all three categories, figures and tropes, emotional appeals, witness testimonies, examples, etc.

The same can be said about rhetorical argumentation and the different approaches to persuasion, which actually refer mainly to the audience and are related to its analysis, something that can be noted especially distinctly in the *Phaedo* dialogue of Plato. The one which talks about the types of souls and the types of words, etc. and the finding of the appropriate word and the appropriate moment for each particular soul. Or perfect refinement of the impact on the targeted audience, which the author defines as *centeredness* on the audience for the purposes of persuasive communication. Models of audience analysis and methods for collecting information about the audience and possibly for its individual members are proposed. The monograph emphasizes the importance of drawing different types of audience profiles in the process of adapting to it, without which the impact is unthinkable. A distinction is rightly made between the preliminary adaptation and the adaptation on the spot - during the communication process. Audience adaptations in business communication and online audiences are specifically considered. Here I would recommend that in a subsequent edition of the monograph significantly more attention should be paid to online adaptations. This is a relatively new sphere of communication and there is a huge field for its refinement when contacting this type of audience. The theory is still in debt to the practice. I would also propose a more complete survey of this audience, although what is said about the media audience in Chapter 1 applies to it as well. In terms of modern times, even simple

observation shows that the online audience has not yet developed protective mechanisms against manipulation and has specifics that deserve special, thorough and detailed examination. This would be a contribution not only to Bulgarian scientific literature and not only to rhetoric, although it would be done by specialist in rhetoric. This can not be done in this publication to such an extent, but I highly recommend it for a topic of a separate study. It is very appropriate to study the manipulative impact - black PR, ad hominem, etc. related, but not limited, to the political realization of competitors.

As a contribution in the other publications, it is worth pointing out to the effect of the identifiable victim as a topic not previously consistently studied in our literature. The same applies to audiences of vulnerable people in a state of emotional crisis. The emphasis is on the nonverbal dimensions of communicating with such an audience. The nonverbal always performs one of its main functions by appearing as an indicator of the intentions and states of the individual, both before and during the communication process, as well as after it. Good understanding of the nonverbal in such a context will not only be a carrier of preliminary information and feedback, but also an efficiency measure, which is why it is justifiably addressed in detail. This can also be a topic for a separate and more voluminous research. Focus groups and interviews were used to gather information for research papers. For typifying the indicators, in order to reach unified understanding, the research focus is on representatives of the so-called helping professions – psychologists, counselors, social workers, etc.

Thus can be addressed not only the crisis, but also its type, depth which allows for optimisation of the impact and specifically of its nonverbal aspect. Again in relation to such difficult audiences – people in a crisis usually accompanied by distress - the uncertainty reduction theory has been discussed. An analysis by the author has been proposed for its possible application to such audiences. This problem has not yet found a deserving place in our scientific literature. Dr. Donka Petrova is not limited in her research to direct audiences in crises of a different nature - health, emotional, social, related to abuse, etc. A good analysis of the specifics of contact with a telephone audience is also proposed and the specifics of telephone communication are discussed, and again here the emphasis is on the nonverbal. More specifically, due to the communication channel itself the focus is on the vocalics – loudness, vocal timbre, tone, etc. Telephone counseling of such audiences is specifically addressed. This type of counselling is relatively rare in the practice. The author has based her writings on her own experience, as well as this of colleagues, counselors, interviewers, observers, etc.

Another area of interest to the author is leadership, and in particular charismatic leadership. This is another "eternal" topic of rhetoric. It is important for the speaker as a communicator, a leader and for the leadership qualities of the speaker. And for the speaker's charisma. As much as it has been written about leaders and leadership, this topic in the context of the rhetoric in Bulgaria has also not found sufficient research development and what the author says deserves

admiration. Not only because of the importance of the problem, but also because it is viewed through the prism of latest theoretical framework in this field that has been in development since the last decade of the last century. The leadership ethos and attacks against it is well represented by the analysis of the manipulative techniques grouped around the topic of *character attacks*.

As a person tempted by the field of nonverbal communication, I want to emphasize the good representation of the various forms of the nonverbal - appearance, kinesics, proxemics, vocalization in analyzing obedience and dominance and thus in negotiating relationships - clothing and accessories, positions in space, territorial status, orientation, height, look and quantity of gaze, etc. all fall into focus in another of her publications. The study has not only a theoretical, but also a serious practical contribution. In this sense, specific author's contributions could also be used in the practice.

Dr. Donka Petrova, in addition to the monograph about the audience, has also presented for participation in the competition a significant number of other works, articles and studies, of which two are co-authored.

Chief assistant prof. Donka Petrova has over the years of being a member of the Department of Rhetoric developed not only as a researcher and author of quality scientific production, but also as a wonderful teacher. As someone who communicates with ease with the students, even when teaching complex subjects. And with her

colleagues at the Department of Rhetoric she shows in practice her skills for teamwork.

In conclusion, having regard to all that has been said, I propose to the honourable members of the scientific jury that chief assistant prof. Dr. Donka Gencheva Petrova be elected to the academic position *associate professor* in professional field 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric), announced in the State Gazette issue No.103 from 10.12.2021.

Prof. Velichko Rumenchev

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