

IV International Symposia of the Portuguese Society of Rhetoric



“The Rhetoric of Silence:
Places of comfort,
resistance, and violence

”

2-3 JUL.
2026

Faculty of Arts and Humanities
University of Coimbra

IN-PERSON

Call for papers:
until November 21, 2025

Communication of results:
from January 5, 2026

Registration:
late January to May 22, 2026

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The Rhetoric of Silence:

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What is the essence of silence? Is it possible to grasp it as a concept and theory? Common sense would say it is the simple absence of words or noise, emptiness, something intangible. How to explain the expression “keep silence,” different still from *silentium facere* (‘shutting up’, according to Titus Livius). Seneca stated that *life’s tragedies teach us the art of silence*, as if holding words in was synonymous with prudence and wisdom. Shakespeare too preferred to be *king of his silence than slave of his words*. Spinoza wished men had the same capabilities in silence that they possess during speech. Eugénio de Andrade claims we can *spend everything but silence*. Popular sayings also have something to say about silence: *speech is silver, silence is golden* or *a good listener understands with half a word*. Studies indicate that silence can account for between 30 and 50% of the time of a speech (political or otherwise) with all its pauses, suspensions, hesitations, and omissions. For the oppressed, silence can represent their powerlessness, resignation, and resistance; for the oppressors, it can convey violence and indifference. Silence is manifested differently in each of its semantic-pragmatic fulfilments: silence of fascination or spite, of relaxation or tension, of serenity or anguish, of rapprochement or detachment from others. Silence is a tool for accomplices and for the guilty. In times of disease, it means mourning; in times of war, it means death; in idyllic times, it means peace.

The Homeric poems may not be read without an awareness of how silenced and silent the female voices were. Telemachus’s refusal to hear Penelope out might well be the first example in Western literature of a man telling a woman to be quiet. Could it be possible, however, for us to interpret Penelope’s silences? In a similar fashion, what role is silence given in the old Graeco-Roman treatises on rhetoric, written by Sophists and authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian? Silence deserves special attention as a communicative skill in the remaining literary genres of Antiquity: tragic, comedic, historiographic, lyrical, and other semiotic systems such as painting and sculpture – which resort to non-verbal rhetorical strategies that nonetheless potentiate an intimate linguistic flow. In Renaissance Humanism, encyclopaedic works (“Collectanea”, “Miscellanea”, “Adagia”) reveal the philological labour of suppression and containment, in the *multiplex imitatio* and the *ars colligendi* of aphorisms and sentences – *maxima in minimis*.

Since Antiquity, historiography has employed rhetorical strategies that hint at silences, selections and omissions. Meanwhile, *hyper-contemporary* literature explores them fictionally, building from the rubble other/new alternatives of what was not accomplished, what might have been, shedding light on some of these blind spots. Post-colonial studies are an example of this, highlighting pains and processes, in the sublimation of traumas and in the quest to give voice to the silences that settled in the folds of Time.

In the field of philosophy (of language and more), Kierkegaard spoke of silence as an *inexpressible interiority*, of an *ineffable connection between the individual and the Absolute*. Theology leans on that space of welcoming, introspection, and encounter with the Divine, which Dionysius the Areopagite described as apophatic theology, St. John of the Cross, as an oxymoron of absence in that *dark night*. If we think of the first logical-stylistic expedients that serve as strategies of silence, we note concepts such as *aposiopesis*, *abruptio*, *suppiratio*, *ellipsis*, *synecdoche*, *homoioptoton*, and *homoioteleuton*. The ellipsis and ambiguity, which are articulated with irony and sarcasm, are integral to the prolific structures of Humour studies.

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In this *Society of Deception*, of voracious immediatism exponentiated by AI, *dry texters* continue to harbour, in their dangerous silences, omissions, and distortions devoid of any affective quality. In the *Era of hyper-communication*, where we receive an infinitude of stimuli on a daily basis, in this agglomeration and overlap of information, what role do we attribute to silence, now seemingly confined into a place of isolation? Could silence be a means of resistance, capable of deepening, decanting, and preserving something unharmed by the erosion of Time? Will silence, after all, always have the final word?

To reflect upon these and other questions, the Portuguese Society of Rhetoric (SPRG) and the Centre for Classical and Humanistic Studies of the University of Coimbra (CECH) are opening a call for proposals on lectures for the conference that will take place on July 2 and 3, 2026, at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra. Proposals concerning any of the following topics, as well as any others deemed pertinent, are welcome:

- History of Rhetoric
- Rhetoric of History
- Rhetoric and Gender Studies
- Rhetoric and Discourse Analysis
- Rhetoric and Argumentation
- Rhetoric and Advertising
- Rhetoric and Music
- Rhetoric and Philosophy
- Rhetoric and Humour
- Rhetoric and Literature
- Rhetoric and Politics
- Rhetoric and AI
- Rhetoric and Translation
- Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Art

Those interested should **submit their proposals by November 21, 2025**. Proposals will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee, which will announce the accepted proposals starting from January 5, 2025. Each lecture should have a maximum length of 20 minutes, and may be delivered in Portuguese or one of the following languages: Spanish, French, Italian, English, and German. The conference will be strictly in-person. For information on registration fees, please visit the following [webpage](#). All correspondence relating to the conference should be sent exclusively to the following email address: spr.jornadas@gmail.com

Rules for submitting abstracts

- 1) Fill in the following file: [TEMPLATE DOCUMENT](#)
- 2) Submit the proposal using the following [form](#).

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Registration

- Partners of the SPR: 60 €.
- Non-partners of the SPR: 90 €.
- Students and non-faculty researchers (apart from university students, SPR partners, and CECH researchers): 30 €.
- Attendance, without communication, with access to coffee breaks and certificate: 20 €.
- Assistance, without communication: free

Keynote Speakers

- Professor [Robin Reames](#) (President of the International Society for the History of Rhetoric)
- Professor [Francisco Chico Rico](#) (Ibero-American Organisation of Rhetoric (OIR) and Spanish Society of Rhetoric)
- Professor [Juan Luis Conde](#) (President of the Spanish Society of Rhetoric, Department of Classical Philology, Complutense University)
- Professor [Belmiro Fernandes Pereira](#) (founder of the Portuguese Society of Rhetoric, University of Porto)

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- Tatiana Faia (Independent Researcher)

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