

27th Annual Conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English Conference Report

The 27th annual conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English was hosted by the University of Łódź. The conference sessions were spread over three days (25-27 June 2018) and attracted almost a hundred participants from Poland and other countries such as Italy, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. The theme of the conference was the notion of identity, and the various papers, situated within literary studies, linguistics, as well as cultural and media studies, aimed to approach this concept through a range of different methodologies, case studies and theoretical assumptions.

The literary sessions of the 2018 PASE conference dealt with topics such as gender identity and the dynamics of national politics, investigating how notions such as these become intertwined with problems of personal identity formation. The latter issue found its reflection in Professor Jan Jędrzejewski's plenary lecture about Anglo-Irish identities in the nineteenth century, whereas Professor Christoph Bode devoted his lecture to the poetics of non-identity in the works of John Keats. The linguistic sessions were also grounded within the area of identity construction, with Professor Adam Głaz addressing in his lecture the idea of hybridity and the importance of hybrid identities for understanding the modern world. The two other plenary speakers, Professor Agnieszka Kielkiewicz-Janowiak and Professor Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, approached identity through different theoretical lenses, the former dealing with generational identities and the latter outlining how particular modes of constructing emotions relate to one's cultural identity.

The chronological span of the works, genres and media that the various papers addressed was not limited to any particular period, and the conference included sessions about medieval poetry as well as discussions of the latest, future-oriented television series. Participants had both an opportunity to attend a session subjecting the language of Geoffrey Chaucer to linguistic analysis and a chance to learn more about the role of identity in organizing education in a global, multicultural context. A number of special discussion panels were also held, the largest one dealing with hate speech and verbal aggression

and attracting as many as ten different speakers and a large audience. Although many papers were streamlined to deal with particular works of culture or offer analyses of case studies, it is worth noting that the q&a sessions following the papers provided a forum for a more general discussion about identity, not just in an academic context but also in terms of bringing to light the mechanisms of Othering and their role in shaping hierarchies and maintaining the *status quo*. The hate speech discussion panel in particular provided insights into how understanding such mechanisms may help diffuse and oppose the symbolic violence inherent in public discourses.

The conference concluded with a guided tour of Łódź, a city that itself provides ample opportunity for studying how identities are shaped, reshaped and reinvented. Having refashioned itself as a creative arts centre and multimodal industry hub, Łódź may seem to have turned its back on its textile past as an industrial monoculture, but the city has managed to modernize its run-down factory districts and bring in the new without shedding away the old. The conference, which was held in the new building of the Faculty of Philology, a short distance away from the new city centre and right next to the grounds of the 2024 Horticultural Expo, was a testimony to the importance of academic reflection on identity construction and its relevance to the places and spaces that govern our lives in the twenty-first century.