



## WHEN ECOCRITICISM AND RHETORIC MEET: AN ANALYSIS OF GRETA THUNBERG'S *NO ONE IS TOO SMALL TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE*

MARIA MICHAEL

Assistant Professor on contract

Department of English, Pavanatma College, Kerala, India

E.mail: [mariamichael1993@gmail.com](mailto:mariamichael1993@gmail.com)



Article Received:31/12/2020

Article Accepted: 16/01/2021

Published online:22/01/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.1.33](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.1.33)

### Abstract

This paper examines how ecocriticism incorporates the rhetorical elements as a methodological support for environmental persuasion. The literary narrative *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference* consists of a collection of eleven speeches which Greta Thunberg has written and presented about climate change and global warming in front of the UN, the EU, and the World Economic Forum and during her demonstrations and protests. The groundbreaking speeches of Greta become the voice of present generation; inspire millions of pupils to go on strike for our planet, forcing governments to listen and earning her a Nobel Peace Prize nomination. She motivates millions to wake up and fight to protect the ecology. Ecocriticism is generally concerned with humanities-based studies of environmental representation and this paper shall elaborate how ecocriticism reads eco-activist literature as a tool of influencing readers concerning human relations with ecology.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Rhetoric, Greta Thunberg, Ecology

### 1. Introduction

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment from an interdisciplinary point of view. It is an umbrella term that embraces literature, nature and culture. Therefore it enquires how human nature is connected to the natural world and how it is affecting and affected by outside nature. Initially ecocriticism focuses on nature writing and celebration of wilderness but subsequently it has broadened to incorporate a wide range of other forms such as ecofeminism, ecospirituality, ecolinguistics and climate change criticism. In earlier times nature has been less realistically represented in literature but now more realistic representations arise. Ecocriticism focuses on the humanity's destructive impact on the biosphere

and it critically approaches literature. It explores the representation of nature in literature in the midst of modern issues of global warming, deforestation, pollution, biodiversity depletion and ecological imbalances.

The present decade has seen a lot of Green movements and Save the Earth campaigns. Environmental or ecological issues are the most dangerous issues facing by countries and communities. It is in this context of earthliness ecocriticism has emerged as a prominent mode of literary criticism and critical theory. It becomes an integral part of both literature studies and environmental humanities. Ecocriticism is "the web of relationships between cultural products and nature and expressing cultural and literary critiques

from an environmentally political perspective” (Rueckert 107).

## 2. Greta Thunberg as an environmental activist

Environmental crisis becomes a widely talked global issue and therefore the United Nations has been regularly organizing international conferences to address the problem of climate change and help the nations meet the challenges thereof. In such a conference a young Swedish girl won worldwide acknowledgement. Greta Thunberg is the young Swedish climate change activist whose campaigning has gained a worldwide recognition after she addressed the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Greta Thunberg was born on 3 January 2003 in Stockholm as the daughter of opera singer Malena Ernman and actor Svante Thunberg. Her paternal grandfather is an actor and director Olof Thunberg. In August 2018, at the age 15, she began spending her school days outside the Swedish parliament to call for stronger action on global warming by holding up a sign saying (in Swedish) "School strike for the climate". Soon, other students engaged in similar protests in their own communities. Together, they organized a school climate strike movement under the name Fridays for Future. Greta's sudden rise to world fame has made her a leader and a target. In May 2019, she was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, which named her a "next generation leader" and noted that many see her as a role model. Greta and the school strike movement were also featured in a 30-minute *Vice* documentary titled *Make the World Greta Again*. Some media have described her impact on the world stage as the "Greta Thunberg effect". She has been the recipient of numerous honours and awards, including fellowship of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and being named as one of the 100 most influential people of 2019 by *Time* magazine, eventually being named *Time* Person of the Year 2019 later that year. She was the youngest ever *Time* Person of the Year. Greta was also nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize.

*No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference* is a book published by Greta Thunberg on 30 May 2019. It consists of a collection of eleven speeches which she has written and presented about global warming and climate change. Thunberg has presented the speeches in front of the UN, the EU, the World Economic Forum and during demonstrations and protests. The eleven speeches are "Our Lives Are in Your Hands", "Almost Everything Is Black and White", "Unpopular", "Prove Me Wrong", "Our House Is on Fire", "I'm Too Young to Do This", "You're Acting Like Spoiled, Irresponsible Children", "Cathedral Thinking", "Together We Are Making a Difference" and "Can You Hear Me?".

## 3. Theory of Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art of speaking. For the ancient Greeks "rhetoric was the use of logos or logical argument, ethos or speaker credibility, and pathos or emotional argument to construct a persuasive argument. Rhetoric essentially was the art of discourse, of systematically and artfully thinking through the five canons of rhetoric: invention, organization, style, delivery, and memory" (Enos 15). If Greeks used rhetoric as a method to resolve land disputes or the language of sophists, the Romans used rhetoric in civic affairs and for them, it was a practical art that demanded natural ability, engagement in the life of the state, instruction, and practice. Later rhetoric revived as a subject for philosophical inquiry and a public discourse to social movements. Today rhetoric means studying everything from intrapersonal to interpersonal. The central focus of rhetoric is on persuasion. "All human symbol use is inherently persuasive—no matter what our intent, anything we say or write, whether intentional or not, affects those around us" (Foss 60).

## 4. Greta Thunberg as an ecological persuader

Greta Thunberg is an inspiring vegan and her book *No One is Too Small to Make a Difference* is very powerful and convincing. Language is so important; calling what we face by its true name is the key. This is the strongest element of her rhetoric; her simple and mature ability to rationalize and address the problem at hand: the

environmental crisis. She has called adults out on their irresponsibility and complete lack of foresight. Her words work towards shaming our so-called leaders and governments that are tasked with protecting the welfare of their nations. It takes the words of a child (the words of the future generation) to get people to listen and they certainly have had a rippling effect on an international level. The speech Greta Thunberg gave to the Houses of Parliament London was really persuasive:

You lied to us. You gave us false hope. You told us that the future was something to look forward to. And the saddest thing is that most children are not even aware of the fate that awaits us. We will not understand it until it's too late. And yet we are the lucky ones. Those who will be affected the hardest are already suffering the consequences. But their voices are not heard. Is my microphone on? Can you hear me? (72)

Thunberg has always stated that humanity is facing an existential crisis due to climate change that the current generation of adults is responsible for climate change and climate change will have a disproportionate effect on young people, and that too little is being done about the situation. She has also stated that politicians and decision-makers need to listen to the scientists. Thunberg's rhetoric uses graphic analogies to highlight her concerns.

In February 2019, 224 academics signed an open letter of support stating they were inspired by the actions of Thunberg and the striking school children in making their voices heard. Thunberg has inspired a number of her school-aged peers in what has been described as "The Greta effect". In response to her outspoken stance, various politicians have also acknowledged the need to focus on climate change. Inspired by Thunberg, wealthy philanthropists and investors from the United States have donated almost half a million pounds to support Extinction Rebellion and school strike groups to establish the Climate Emergency Fund.

## 5. Conclusion

Rhetorical moves used by climate activists like Greta influenced many and we learn from them about human beings attitude towards nature and ecology. Greta's speeches give us the scientific awareness of ecology and her work reveals the interconnections of nature and humanity. Ecocriticism is a vast field of study that attracts a wide array of specialists from artists to scientists and everyone in between. She uses rhetoric as a method to support ecocriticism and moves a step forward towards theorizing eco activism.

## Works cited

- Buell, Lawrance. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell. London. 2005. Print
- Enos, R. L. *Roman rhetoric: Revolution and the Greek influence*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland. 1995. Print
- Foss, S. K. , Foss, K. A. , & Trapp, R. Contemporary perspectives on rhetoric (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland. 2002. Print
- Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, 105–123. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print
- Thunberg, Greta. *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference*. Penguin Random House.UK. 2019. Print