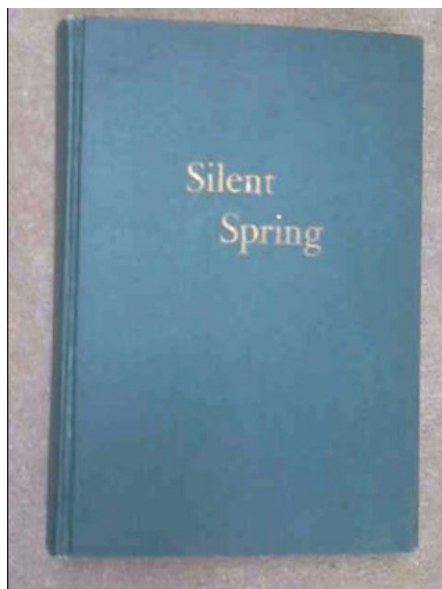




Silent Spring

Rachel Carson

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Silent Spring

Rachel Carson

Silent Spring Rachel Carson

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Silent Spring Details

Date : Published January 1st 1962 by Houghton Mifflin Company/Riverside Press

ISBN : 9780395075067

Author : Rachel Carson

Format : cloth 368 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Science, Environment, Classics, Nature



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From Reader Review Silent Spring for online ebook

Debbie "DJ" says

How could I forget the first book I read about pesticides, and how they are destroying our planet? Rachel Carson is literally my hero. After reading Carson's book, I decided this is what I wanted to do with my life. I spent many years in the field of environmental geology, and I have her to thank. I believe this book is as relevant today as it was when she wrote it in 1962. She has an ease of writing, that not only expresses her deep concerns for the environment, but also feels highly personal. Her love of nature shines through on every page. Time has surely been the test of her writing, as I look around today and see what profound affects these chemicals have had on our world, our planet, and our health. It is fascinating to read of one highly intelligent woman's concerns for the future, and how we had the opportunity to act years ago. As fascinating a read now as it was then. Highly recommended.

David Schaafsma says

"She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted."--Mitch McConnell, about Elizabeth Warren

Poisoning the Planet with Impunity [Part 2, 2017]

"Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the earth."—Albert Schweitzer

This lovely, eloquent, poetic book, published in 1962 and nominated for The National Book Award, was read to me by the woman who played the part of Rachel in the movie, Kaiulani Lee, in a gentle voice that belies the storm the book still faces even today. The book was written by a scientist, marine biologist Carson, who had written the perhaps more poetic and less scientific but also popular *The Sea Around Us*, published seven years before, and its successor, *The Edge of the Sea*. These books were essentially about the love of nature and "the sense of wonder" we need to appreciate the world around us.

But Carson saw horrific, ignorant things happening to the environment in the fifties. She took four years to carefully research and document all across this country the poisoning of the country. Carson and her publisher braced themselves for the response they knew was surely coming. Even before publication they were sued by chemical companies, unsuccessfully, and were on publication almost immediately and unrelentlessly vilified by what was then Corporate Farming America [yes, the people who are bringing the planet Frankenfood], something that has continued unabated to this day by an amalgamation of anti-environmental climate change deniers and so on. Hundreds of dollars then were spent by the chemical industry in an attempt to discredit the book and to malign the author—she was described as an ignorant and hysterical woman who wanted to turn the earth over to the insects.

"The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man. The concepts and practices of applied entomology for the most part date from that Stone Age of science. It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the insects it has also turned them against the earth."—Carson

Occasionally there are books that change the world. One such book was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet

Beecher Stowe that almost singlehandedly turned white women firmly against slavery by depicting the cruel sale of slave children taken from their mother. Silent Spring, similarly warns us of the health concerns for (especially) children, even warning of the possibility of future birth defects. Carson, a scientist writing in a popular science mode, carefully lays out the case against DDT and other indiscriminately sprayed chemicals that were destroying ecosystems, endangering lives. She made the link between these poisons and cancer and other man-made diseases. As a direct result of the message in Silent Spring, President Kennedy set up a special panel to study the problem of pesticides. Though it took ten years to do it, DDT (and many other poisons) was banned in 1972.

Carson with Silent Spring almost singlehandedly ushered in the environmental movement based on her study of 1950's pesticide. We would not have had the EPA without Carson, possibly. When I was a kid in the sixties we drove through a putrid fog from Grand Rapids to Chicago. We swam in Lake Michigan in the midst of dead fish. I doubt you could swim in the lake on the Chicago side. Lake Erie was a dumping latrine. But beginning in the mid-sixties we turned around the destruction of the environment, though it in truth that destruction was just slowed down, as you know. The world's oceans have raised a frightening 2 degrees in just the past fifty years. And so on.

"We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road—the one 'less traveled by'—offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth."--
Carson

To those of you romanticizing deregulation (freedom from the oppressive state, let's support Big Biz Profits instead of protecting Greedy Poor People and the environment, right on), and the roll back of The Clean Water Act:

<http://hosted2.ap.org/APDEFAULT/f7047...>

Because we need more Flints.

Save the planet, I say. Prove Schweitzer wrong. Vote for the planet and take to the streets.

PattyMacDotComma says

5★+! *Reposted in honour of her 111th birthday!*

David Attenborough said that after Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species, Silent Spring was probably the book that changed the scientific world the most.

Why? Because marine biologist Rachel Carson explains in no uncertain terms exactly how mankind was changing the natural world for the worse in unimagined ways through pesticide use. Agriculture wasn't concerned with wildlife or waterways, just livestock and crops.

I remember as a child hearing that DDT was so safe you could sprinkle it on your cornflakes. A couple of decades later we were told pretty much the same thing about Roundup, a herbicide, not a pesticide, which has also fallen into serious disrepute recently.

I understand it was the editors who recommended that Carson add an opening chapter. She wrote **“A Fable for Tomorrow”**, and what a chapter it is!

“There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields. . . Even in winter, the roadsides were places of beauty, where countless birds came to feed on the berries and on the seed heads of the dried weeds rising above the snow.”

Then, it all changed. Mysteriously, things began sickening: streams, plants, animals, people. The songbirds are gone, the fish are gone.

“A grim spectre has crept upon us almost unnoticed, and this imagined tragedy may easily become a stark reality we all shall know.”

She does say that this is just a representation of any of a number of towns in the world, and she knows of no single town that’s lost everything. (Well, back in 1962, anyway.)

“What has already silenced the voices of spring in countless towns in America? This book is an attempt to explain.”

With that simple chapter, we get it. The enormity of what’s at stake.

Thus began today’s environmental movement. There have always been conservationists and environmentalists, but this book gave them a voice and opened the eyes of the rest of us.

And explain she does, clearly, factually, fascinatingly, and she includes the anecdotal stories we still seem to need to grab our attention. Much of what she describes is now part of the regular school curriculum, and there are lots of mainstream articles about soil health, microbes, worms and the interrelationship between even the smallest parts of nature.

Some of her examples have a horrible fascination where they describe the unintended consequences of wiping out one pest intentionally which either kills other things or facilitates the spread of another, worse pest.

In Clear Lake, California, they were spraying annoying gnats with DDD, a close relative of DDT but supposedly less harmful to fish. By the third season they sprayed, they were losing birds and discovered the build-up in fatty tissues. How? Why?

Well, grebes eat fish, which eat other fish which eat plankton . . . and this stuff keeps building up.

“One, a brown bullhead, had the astounding concentration of 2500 parts per million. It was a house-that-jack-built sequence, in which the large carnivores had eaten the smaller carnivores, that had eaten the herbivores, that had eaten the plankton, that had absorbed the poison from the water.”

The last chapter, **“The Other Road”** refers to the famous Robert Frost poem, **“The Road Not Taken”**. Carson explains that our two roads are not equal. The way we’re going is fast and easy but leads to disaster.

“The other fork of the road—the one ‘less travelled by’—offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth. The choice, after all, is ours to make.”

She holds out hope for more biological solutions and says (in 1962) many specialists are working on this in their respective fields: biology, entomology, biochemistry, genetics, too many to enumerate.

She quotes professor Carl P. Swanson, a Johns Hopkins biologist:

"Any science may be likened to a river. It has its obscure and unpretentious beginning; its quiet stretches as well as its rapids; its periods of drought as well as of fullness. It gathers momentum with the work of many investigators and as it is fed by other streams of thought; it is deepened and broadened by the concepts and generalizations that are gradually evolved."

Why haven't we learned yet? It's hard to believe that we have celebrated the 50th anniversary of this book without demanding our governments respect independent scientific reports and give corporate lobbyists the short shrift they deserve.

What will be left of the world on its 100th anniversary, I wonder?

This is an everybody-should-read-this book!

Janet says

What is there to add to the universal praise for Rachel Carson? This book isn't a walk in the park, and it's crammed with (accessible) Scientific data, but it changed the world.

I was more fascinated by Carson's rhetoric than in her findings, which are now more than 45 years old. I read this book to learn how she built a case that challenged every major scientific, political and corporate institution in the country. And she did it by connecting with the shared values of average Americans. Bravo, Rachel!

Ken-ichi says

I picked this up because it's a classic of American nature and environmental writing, and ostensibly marks the beginning of American environmental activism in the modern sense (i.e. more "we deserve not to be poisoned" than "leisure grounds for posterity"). I found the rhetorical style interesting. She breaks the book up into chapters on where toxins come from, how they accumulate and spread, and what effects they have on wildlife, food, and human health. In each, she offloads tale after tale of dead birds, poisoned farm workers, and nearly inhuman acts of government negligence and the corporations that facilitate them. I found this droning repetition of evidence boring, a dull and depressing tirade, but I suppose that kind of argumentative overload has power, if not appeal.

I felt some of her language and opinions were surprisingly dated. She often referred to insects using words like "horde" and militaristic symbols of weaponry and defense. Here's an example from p. 246: "the broader problem [...] is the fact that our chemical attack is weakening the defenses inherent in the environment itself, defenses designed to keep the various species in check. Each time we breach these defenses a horde of insects pours through." There are a couple odd implications here, like nature being a "designed" clockwork system of checks and balances, and insects as a kind of evil constantly trying to overthrow it. Of course, further down the page she writes, "The balance of nature is not a *status quo*; it is fluid, ever shifting, in a constant state of adjustment." The two statements seem at odds, and the bulk of the book effuses the latter

sentiment, but I found it strange that she would occasionally be so careless with her language. I pick nits, of course, but perhaps it demonstrates that this book lies at a transition between American attitudes toward nature.

I was also intrigued by her almost unconditional support of biological control techniques over pesticides (generally, the use of cultivated predators to control a pest population), readily advocating the importation of effective predators with (I think) no examples of the kinds of ecological disaster that can ensue when such tactics are pursued without very careful consideration (cane toads, anyone?). Again, perhaps a sign of the times.

All in all, certainly worth my time. I'd like to read some more analysis on the book and on Carson herself (the preface to this editions is great), and I'm very keen to read her natural history writing, esp. on marine life.

Edward says

Acknowledgements

Author's Note

Introduction, by Lord Shackleton

Preface, by Julian Huxley, F.R.S.

--Silent Spring

Afterword, by Linda Lear

List of Principal Sources

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Roy Lotz says

Advocacy is tricky. When you're trying to motivate people to take action, you need to decide whether to appeal to the head, to the heart, to some combination of the two, or perhaps to some more delicate faculty. Upton Sinclair miscalculated when he wrote *The Jungle*, aiming for the heart but instead hitting the stomach; and as a result, the book was interpreted as an exposé of the meat industry rather than a plea for the working poor. Aldo Leopold, in *A Sand County Almanac*, eschews appeals to expediency, and instead focuses on the spiritual joys of wild nature; but his book didn't result in any legislation. Rachel Carson seems to have found the right formula: an urgent and multifaceted appeal to self-interest.

Silent Spring is often grouped along with Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which came out just the year before, in 1961. The comparison is apt, for both books were written by academic outsiders, by women working independently in male-dominated fields, and both books created a sensation. In subject matter, too, the books are surprisingly close. Jacobs describes how top-down city planning, which doesn't take into account the needs of city-dwellers or the complex economies of cities, only causes ruination. Carson describes how indiscriminate use of pesticides destroys ecosystems and fails even to permanently kill the pests. Both books, in other words, criticize a practice taken for granted, a practice that attempted to mold the world using brute force while remaining ignorant of the systems it attempted to shape.

Even today, Carson's book retains its moral urgency and its morbid fascination. Not only is Carson a knowledgeable scientist, but she is quite a gifted author. She knows how to drive home her point using

vivid—and often frightening—examples, detailing case after case of poisonings, in animals and humans. And she supplements her examples with scientific explanations, showing us how poisons spread through the environment, are absorbed into the body, and disrupt natural processes. She knew that the chemical industry was going to fight her tooth and nail, so she did not leave any stones unturned in her research. She systematically goes through the effects of pesticides on soil, water, birds, and plants, offering case after case in support of her thesis. Now that we take it for granted that pesticides shouldn't be applied with such wholesale zeal, this can actually be a little tedious. When advocacy is effective, it renders itself obsolete.

But Carson does not make the mistake of focusing only on the environment. She emphasizes again and again how pesticides can enter foods, can combine in the body, can kill livestock and desolate fish, can enter the skin through commercial lawn products—in other words, she emphasizes that this problem is not abstract and distant, but is one that closely affects the reader. It is this focus that makes the book so effective: she appeals to the stomach, the heart, the head, and also to Aldo Leopold's spiritual values—but most of all, she appeals to self-interest, the strongest motivator of all.

Riku Sayuj says

A must read book for the concerned. Carson brings forth, without ever putting on alarmist garbs, all the horrors of the warfare that we have undertaken against ourselves.

The book is of course outdated and most of the bigger concerns have been, if not addressed, at least taken seriously. But the true value of the book is in understanding how long a time frame has to elapse before such matters of truly catastrophic nature follows the process of scientific suspicion, investigation, verification, then the slow seepage into public consciousness, then the denialism and finally the first baby steps of public policy.

Reading the book so many years after its intended audience we have to go beyond the book and apply the concern to the current issues that we face. It is not the facts or the issues that is important, it is the attitude that Carson endorses.

With the potent weapons in our hands, can we still afford to be so lax in our reaction to life threatening dangers sneering in our face? Will nature be so forgiving next time around?

As crude a weapon as the cave man's club, the incomplete human knowledge has been hurled against the fabric of life without any consideration of the risks which is beyond our current understanding or technology to calculate.

Donna says

This is nonfiction concerning the harmful effects that chemicals, which were created to make life easier for man (pesticides, weed killers, etc.) have on the environment. This was first published in 1962 and the author is credited for opening the door on his topic. However, even now, 55 years later, it is still considered a hot topic. Great strides have been made in this arena, but vigilance must me constant.

While reading this, I kept thinking that ignorance is bliss ONLY for those who don't have to pay the price. This book made me rethink my own gardening and lawn habits....what I should or should not use to curb weeds and crabgrass. Definitely food for thought.

Sarah Enescu says

I have a personal rule when reading books. If I am not completely absorbed into it within fifty pages I put it down. This rule doesn't work well for assigned reading, and fifty pages into Silent Spring I was so bored I was spending more time thinking of ways to avoid reading the book than actually reading it. Finally it occurred to me the reasons why I felt this boredom. After all, the book is not boring, Carson writes with a feverish passion towards defending nature that simply following her choice of verbs is intriguing. Anything relative to wildlife and plants are written with a frilly dreamlike flow of words, as if she is trying to conjure up a still image from a Disney animation. The moment man and pesticides are brought into context all flow ends and she writes in stark single word descriptions. It very effectively shows what side she is defending. This is when I realized what I was missing, which was causing my boredom. This is a very old book.

Approaching this book to learn the obvious intentions was not a wise path for me. I needed to look at this book as a piece of history, a landmark to understand why we are where we are in our agricultural systems. Silent Spring was a success, and because all the various evidence that she uses in her book are examples I was strongly familiar with, solidly shows what type of impact her argument made.

I found the book to be very narrow minded. It was truly a cry, every page being a diatribe of complaints, never offering solid solutions. Yet, she consistently used that approach throughout the book making the reader create a deep sorrow for her, maybe even pity towards what she felt was being lost. If she were to offer two sides, or a bigger picture, she would not have come across so in need and injured. Less people would wanted to help in her quest for change. So, she kept this consistency by forming her arguments with great vagueness and working on the fears already established by people. She vaguely shares that the DDT founder won a Nobel Prize, but never that DDT was awarded that prize for saving lives in the World War I, in the area of medicine. She takes arsenic, a toxic element, and describes how it is found in increased amounts in our soil, leading to increased content in tobacco. She knows the association that people have with arsenic being a poison, but is it not also an essential element to man and plants? And where were the epidemic proportions of deaths associated with this increase? She has no need to answer these questions. Throughout the first third of the book she successfully chooses examples that the reader is already afraid of and lures them in from this to increase her credibility. I don't condemn it I cheer her for it. This is the type of extremism that when a person is subjected to it they can simply put the book down if they don't like it.

Today, we are all very fortunate that people did not put down the book.

Throughout the rest of the book I shook my head, thinking of all her over the top accusations toward increased pesticide use, but no mention of modes of action. The academic standpoint she has as a biologist, yet she has never attempted to empathize with the American farmer. The way that she never references what was happening historically in our nation at that time that was putting the demand upon farmers for feeding more people. That was the era of baby boomer, no?

I thank her for her voice and how it has brought about a stronger focus on responsible agricultural practices. However, I hope that others that read this book recognize it's age, and use the examples she documents as milestones to measure how far away from that type of system we have come. Her crying and negativity don't solve problems. She has attacked the practices, and people responded. Today the majority of the insecticides she references are already removed or nearly removed from use today. We no longer need her narrow approach and acknowledging the date of print of her message is vital for people that are moved by it to see it as the birth of a crusade, but not the bible.

Claire says

All I can say is that this book completely rocked my world. Carson's writing is so lyrical, so engrossing, and so compelling it's just impossible not to be mesmerized by the lilt of her sentences. And she presents her arguments with such magnetic conviction you cannot help but be convinced of their legitimacy. I've never been a "science person", but her descriptions of cell life, soil creatures, and even beetles truly had me on the edge of my seat. By the same token her words about pesticides are nothing short of chilling, and since I've read *Silent Spring* I've evolved into a passionate environmentalist. Fair warning: this isn't an easy book to read emotionally. A few times I had to put it down, wondering if I had the courage to keep going and face the truth of what's happening to our world. But every time I went back, and I'm so, so glad that I did. Read *Silent Spring* - I promise you'll never be the same, and that you won't regret it.

Ioana says

Rachel Carson is a feminist hero. In a world of science beholden to capitalist interests and run by men, she defied all conventions in publishing this non-academic yet copiously researched expose on Big-Ag and the effects of pesticide use. She was decried from all angles, not least of all by the scientific establishment, which derided her "pop science" approach and her "hysterical feminine" tone. But it was too late - Carson had appealed to the public, and the public-and their representatives- listened. Congressional investigations were initiated, entire government agencies and departments were formed to address Carson's points, private groups mobilized to protect the environment, and on and on. They aren't kidding when they say Carson provided the spark for the modern environmental movement.

As for the book itself: it is full of now outdated information, and is a bit dry, despite critics who sing Carson's praise as a lyrical writer. It's basically a catalogue of the effects of different kinds of pesticides at various levels (species, community, ecosystem) and on various organisms (from plants to ants to cattle to people). I wouldn't say I *enjoyed* reading it, but I can't rate this as lower than 5 stars due to its historical significance. *Silent Spring's* "Fun to Read" rating is probably between a 2 and a 5, depending on how interested you are in the environmental movement and food sourcing.

Chrissie says

This is a classic. It has not lost its validity. It has an important global message still today, 54 years after publication. Everyone should read this at least once.

This reads as a horror story, but it is true.

- The scientific studies are numerous, clear and to the point.
- The demise of habitats and living creatures are lyrically depicted.
- The author expertly alternates between poetic expression and scientific accuracy.
- Eloquent prose.

That's the essential.

Carson shows through carefully identified and quantified examples the inherent danger of pesticides, that they not only do not work and that they have serious side effects. She goes one step further and identifies better alternatives - biotic controls.

Here is what I wish. I wish another author would follow up her analyses and describe how pesticides and

herbicides are used today. Furthermore it would be interesting to know whether her suggestions concerning alternative methods have come to fruition.

The audiobook narration by Kaiulani Lee was superb! Perfect speed, perfect intonation and performed with a poetic lilt when the lines so demanded. Beautifully and masterfully performed.

Jim says

Update May2018 A couple of good articles about the book were recently brought to my attention. The WSJ one is here:

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/silent-s...>

The Daily Beast did one titled "How Rachel Carson Cost Millions of People Their Lives" about the unintended consequences. It's here:

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-rac...>

I haven't had time to read either yet.

Nov 2008: I've re-read this after maybe 30 years & it is still scary. It is a classic environmental book, detailing how we're changing our ecology & poisoning it. How long the effects linger is just scary & the links to cancer is horrifying.

She occasionally goes over the top, but most often makes good points on how our current practices of bludgeoning nature into our ideal form - which is often mistaken - is not working well & will eventually spell our doom. It was written over 45 years ago &, while a little dated, is still one of the best books I've read on the subject.

It's amazing that we are still using some of the chemicals she shows so much evidence against using. Her well documented atrocities that our government has perpetrated against us are chilling. I never trusted the government all that much but trust them even less now.

Jordan Berg says

I wish this book was not still so poignant. But this book that really started the modern environmental movement and rose the consciences of millions of Americans is still as important today as it was 45 years ago. Whether it's the use of chemicals still sprayed into are yards and on our food today, or lessons on the importance of questioning how our actions affect our world, Rachel Carson broke the mold. Every person needs to read this book.

"What has already silenced the voices of spring in countless towns in America? This book is an attempt to explain." This book will seep into your consciousness and never leave. Its far to important today with global warming, our fossil fuel addiction, and the chemicals that you ingest every day for you NOT to read this book.

