

# Rhetorical analysis of rachel carson's "silent spring"



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In September of 1962, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published directly to alarm the public of the harmfulness of chemical pesticides. Those pesticides include DDT, dieldrin, chlordane, and more that were being used by a way of aerial spraying in an attempt to control insect populations on a very large scale. She goes on to say that they should not be called 'insecticides', but 'biocides' because they kill many living things good and bad. *Silent Spring* is an exposé because it calls out companies and many more to bring a call to action. Carson was a marine biologist which back then the position held very low esteem in the nuclear age, she wasn't living up to the regular woman image. Having no affiliation with big institutions meaning she didn't have a very big voice to be heard. *Silent Spring* lead to a huge global environmental movement that still today is taking place, over 55 years ago think about that. Carson uses plenty of rhetorical strategies throughout *Silent Spring* such as audience, style, language, tone, message, and more. The following rhetorical analysis will investigate Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and its use of rhetorical strategies and conventions.

Rachel Carson's audience in *Silent Spring* is the American people and not just the government and scientist. She needed to reach every person of America and inform them on the harmfulness effects that pesticides could deal out to the environment. She brings a very strong inquiry throughout the first half of the writing but isn't afraid to get right into it with the question "What has already silenced the voices of spring in countless towns in America?" (Carson 3). Carson then uses examples for simple people unlike scientists to understand what these detrimental chemicals were doing to them and the environment they live in. She also lets the people know that

what they're being told isn't always right, " We are told that the enormous and expanding use of pesticides is necessary to maintain farm production. Yet is our real problem not one of overproduction?"(Carson 9). She later says that " man" has risked it's own future just to control some pests, " How could intelligent beings seek to control a few unwanted species by a method that contaminated the entire environment and brought the threat of disease and death even to their own kind? Yet this is precisely what we have done."(Carson 8). Carson isn't afraid to go ahead and get straight to the hard hitting facts and questions.

Silent Spring's style of writing is informative and demanding but one that is easy for the general reader of the public. It starts off as kind of a story with her zooming in on this town that does not actually exist. She leaves all of her citations for later in the book so therefore the reader won't get distracted. During the time after the book she was really kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place because she got ridiculed for her work so imagine if she didn't have any scientific facts and citations within Silent Spring. Her writing overall brought a lot of attention to the harmfulness effects of chemical pesticides and started a movement.

Conventions of Silent Spring meaning which the way its done, Carson states what's happening and then backs it up with facts. And within those facts she includes real known happenings like how our lakes, soil, and more are being contaminated. She states that " Every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death."(Carson 15). In less than 20 years pesticides have been scattered so much that they're now throughout the whole world. " Residues of these

chemicals linger in soil to which they may have been applied a dozen years before. They have entered and lodged in the bodies of fish, birds, reptiles, and domestic and wild animals so universally that scientists carrying on animal experiments find it almost impossible to locate subjects free from such contamination. They have been found in fish in remote mountain lakes, in earthworms burrowing in soil, in the eggs of bird and in man himself.”(Carson 16). Now if that doesn't persuade you to believe that there are some harmful effects in pesticides then I don't know what will. Carson really does a great job by making you feel emotions while reading *Silent Spring*.

The formation of *Silent Spring* is split into two different parts through chapters 1 through 9, Carson is informing you of what's going on within the pesticide world and what it is doing to man and the environment around it. Chapter 10 through the ending, Carson argues that we should think of easier and healthier ways of insect control than just chemical pesticides like bringing in pests to get rid of other insects, crop rotation, and more. She states that aerial spraying of pesticides has become too common and nobody really knows what goes into it. She then goes on to use Dr. Edward Knipling as an example and his techniques of biological solutions as a safer way of insect control. A technique of his was “insect sterilization” where “sterilized males compete with the normal wild males so successfully that, after repeated releases, only infertile eggs would be produced and the population would die out.”(Carson 279). Carson really wants you to bring all the information in as one and take a call to action.

Carson uses two different types of languages throughout *Silent Spring* one formal diction and the other being informal diction. Formal diction meaning she's very educated on her research and it may need a little more explaining to the average reader. Informal diction means it's very understandable to the average reader. Some examples of formal diction would be when Carson uses the hydrogen atoms and carbon atoms and uses visual images, that's a very scientific diction that the average reader wouldn't get.

Rachel Carson's tones in *Silent Spring* are scientific and anger. Her scientific tone gave off a vibe where you can tell she did her research and she lets the information do the work. She keeps her anger under control throughout the writing but you can tell she is angry with the outcomes of the harmful pesticides on humans and the environment. For example, she used a whole chapter to talk about the different types of pesticides and effects of them. "In Florida, two children found an empty bag and used it to repair a swing. Shortly thereafter both of them died and three of their playmates became ill. The bag had once contained an insecticide called parathion, one of the organic phosphates; tests established death by parathion poisoning." (Carson 28). Throughout she gave more examples of humans dying and how the most harmful things go unnoticed.

*Silent Spring's* mission, purpose, and message is to show the many examples of when insecticides produced deadly effects and that nature isn't for the convenience of man and that it cannot be controlled by him. Carson also wants us to know that we have the right to know what is what. She states "It is not my contention that chemical insecticides must never be used. I do contend that we have put poisonous and biologically potent chemicals

indiscriminately into the hands of persons largely or wholly ignorant of their potentials for harm.”(Carson 12).

All in all, what I’ve analyzed is that Rachel Carson wanted to inform people of the serious danger of this chemical threat. Carson was really looking out for everyone else’s well being. She argues that humans should learn to coexist with the environment, and not always try to dominate it. Her overall use of language and tone took over the book and empowered the message. She used pathos to spill emotions and get the message across which really made it persuasive. Carson did a great job by not involving herself in her rhetorical writing by not including her having cancer as a motivation for the piece as a whole. Therefore, nothing falls short throughout *Silent Spring* because it hits all the points and in the end it started a huge environmental movement that still exists today.